

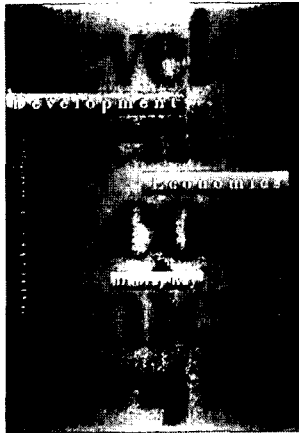
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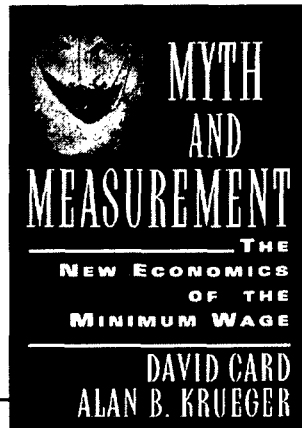
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WIKTOR SADOWSKI

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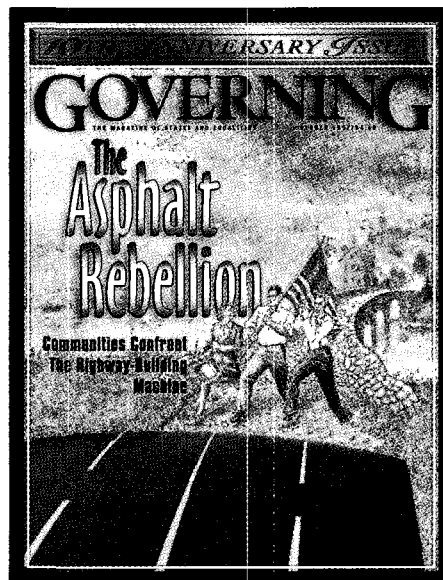
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THE BROOKINGS REVIEW

IN BRIEF

James A. Johnson

THE GREAT W. E. B. DU BOIS PREDICTED IN HIS classic *The Souls of Black Folks* that “the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line.” He was right. America has grappled with the insidious evil of racism throughout the past century. We have made important progress in advancing civil rights and improving race relations. But we know we have much more to do to eradicate all the barriers to racial equality and harmony in our country. Almost one hundred years after Du Bois made his prediction, the “color line” is still a sad and central fact of American life.

We at the Brookings Institution believe that as we approach the turn of a new century—and a new millennium—we have the opportunity and obligation to bring renewed energy, focus, and commitment to resolving the racial issues that still divide our great nation. The diverse and distinguished group of contributors to this issue of the *Brookings Review* offer their perspectives on the topic of “Black America: Progress and Prospects.” I believe the scholarship, the experience, and the insights they share in these pages will make a positive and lasting contribution to this most important of public debates.

James A. Johnson, chairman and CEO of Fannie Mae, is chairman of the board of trustees of the Brookings Institution.

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THE TWO NATIONS

The best of times, the worst of times

Six black men, each intellectually superior in his own way, graduated from Yale College in the class of 1966. Each had managed, through some luck and a lot of pluck, to penetrate the iron-clad barriers that had kept the blacks matriculating at Yale to a fixed number for several decades. When I entered Yale two years later, 95 black men and women entered with me.



LLOYD WOLF

We were, to a person, caught up in the magic of the moment. Our good fortune was to have been selected to be part of the first “large” group of blacks included in Yale’s commitment to educate “1,000 male leaders” each year. But we wondered: what would becoming a true black leader entail—for ourselves and for our people outside those hallowed Ivy walls? What sort of sacrifices and obligations did this special ticket to success bring along with it? We worried about this—out loud, often, and noisily.

Mostly we did our worrying in our long languid dinners in the colleges or in bull sessions in our suites, but our ritualized worrying space was our weekly meetings of the Black Student Alliance at Yale, headed by our black and shining prince, Glenn de Chabert. Our first item of business was always “recruitment,” how to get more black students to join us at New Haven. “This place is lily white,” de Chabert would complain. “We are flies in the buttermilk.” Brimming to overflow with maybe 200 students, the year’s first meeting of the BSAY looked like Harlem to me! I basked in the warmth

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities and chair of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University, is a trustee of the Brookings Institution. This essay is drawn from material presented on the WGBH “Frontline” television documentary aired on February 10.

OF BLACK AMERICA

An essay BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

generated by the comfort of the range of brown colors in that room, but I also shuddered (as unnoticeably as I could) as I contemplated the awesome burden of leadership that we felt or were made to feel, fulfilling our obligations to “help the community.” After all, “the revolution” was unfolding around the country and we, along with students like us at Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, Amherst, and Wesleyan, were to be its vanguard. This burden was no mere abstraction. The trial of New Haven’s Black Panthers, and of one of their leaders, Bobby Seale, was under way just a block or two away at New Haven’s federal courthouse.

It astonishes me today how sharp my black colleagues were, how thoughtful beyond their years, how mature. For some reason, I long assumed that most of these guys were up from the ghetto, first generation college. After all, our uniforms of the day, dashikis and blue jeans, obliterated our variety of social distinctions. Names like Baskerville and Irving, Reed and Robinson, Schmoke and de Chabert, Barrington Parker the Third, meant nothing particular to me. Only later would I discover that my contemporaries were no strangers to the idea of college. Had it not been for affirmative action, we would have met at Howard or Morehouse. They were not so much a new black middle-class bourgeoisie recruited to scale the ladder of class as the scions of an old and colored middle class, recruited to integrate a white male elite. We clung to a soft black nationalist politics to keep ourselves to the straight and narrow.

For me one crucial scene of instruction on the path of a more or less nationalist politics came while I was watching a black program that had been produced by students at Howard.



LLOYD WOLF

In the film, a student, happily dating a white co-ed, comes to see the error of his ways after a campus visit by Maulana Ron Karenga. What a figure Karenga was—brown bald head, African robes, dark sun glasses. This was one bad dude, bad enough to make this guy in the film turn his back on love and come on home! I’m not sure it had ever occurred to me before this that there was “a way to be ‘black,’” that one

could be in the program or outside of it.

Of course I knew what an Uncle Tom was, but even Uncle Tom was still part of the extended family. No one ever talked about *banishing* him from the tribe. Before this. But this was a new day. A new generation, a vanguard within the vanguard of civil rights leadership, was demanding Black Power, the right to take over, and declaring vener-

able elders like Martin Luther King, Jr., to be too old, too tired, too Milquetoast to be effective keepers of Black Power's incandescent flare. Dr. King was especially symptomatic, moving away as he had done from an exclusively race-based politics to a more broadly conceived analysis that would bring "poor people" together. Where did a movement based on poverty leave all of us who were discovering an Afro-coifed dashiki-clad "blackness" long forcibly hidden from our view? Even the Black Panthers, Marxists that they claimed to be, manipulated the trappings of nationalist garb and rhetoric to maximize their appeal in a program that would eventually lead out of the black community and straight into a coalition with the brown and red and white truly poor.

J. Edgar Hoover and his FBI, apparently, were not aware of, or especially concerned about, what Freud called "the narcissism of tiny differences" within the black movement. For Hoover, the Panthers were black, they were radical, they were Communist-inspired. And they could be dealt with.

Systematic repression has a curious way of hampering the evolution of a movement. And not only were the Black Panthers repressed, Dr. King was assassinated—in retrospect the most dramatic act of violent repression in the wing of the movement that was beginning to embrace a class-based organizing principle that sought to reorder American society. Dr. King was killed. People like Huey Newton were imprisoned. And people as unlike as Elijah Mohammed and Vernon Jordan, Jesse Jackson, and my new compatriots at Yale were being invited to integrate a newly expanded American upper middle class. The vanguard of black cultural nationalist political consciousness, in other words, became the vanguard in the race's broad movement across the great divide that had for so long prevented genuine economic mobility up the great American ladder of class.

Somehow, in the late sixties, in the

aftermath of the King assassination, what was held to be "authentically" black began to change. Ghetto culture was valorized; the "bourgeois" lifestyle that the old guard leaders of the civil rights establishment embodied was held to be too great a price to pay for our freedom, or at least to admit to. We wanted to be "real," to "be down with the people," to be successful, yes, but to appear to be "black" at the same time. And to be black was to be committed to a revolution of values, of mores and manners, of economic relationships. We were "a people." The best way to dramatize this kinship was to dress, walk, talk like a "brother."

Being a leader does not necessarily mean being loved; loving one's community means daring to risk estrangement and alienation from it in the short run in order to break the cycle of poverty and despair in which we find ourselves, over the long run.

Above all, being black meant that we were at one with "the revolution," standing tall and firm in defense of "the people," and that revolutionary vanguard, the persecuted and harassed Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. We went on strike on April 15, 1970, two weeks before Nixon and Henry Kissinger invaded Cambodia. We struck because Bobby Seale, we felt deeply, was not being tried fairly just down the street, bound and gagged as he was at the worst moment of the trial. The strike rally was glorious. It seemed as if 100,000 people crowded onto the New Haven Green on May Day of 1970. Kingman Brewster, Yale's dynamic president, offered them food and shelter in the residential colleges. Each stained glass window of the sacred cathedral of learning that we called "Sterling" stood intact at week's end. De Chabert had never spoken more impressively, never been more daring or inspiring.

However, graduation inevitably came, calling us to the newly expanded opportunities in graduate and professional schools and then on to similarly

expanded opportunities in the broader professional and academic world. I went off to Cambridge, England, and when I returned a few years later to teach at Yale, so very much had changed. Any pretense that black admissions would be anything but staunchly and firmly middle class had ended during my absence. The new black middle class was perpetuating itself. Affirmative action, under assault by the Supreme Court's 1978 *Bakke* decision and wounded, still was functioning to increase the size of the middle class exponentially by a factor of four. Meanwhile, the gradual disappearance of industrial jobs in the cities was cutting off that upwardly mobile class escalator that so many in the middle class had been able to scale.

Thenceforth, in one of the most curious social transformations in the class structure in recent American history, two tributaries began to flow, running steadily into two distinct rivers of aspiration and achievement. By 1990, the black middle class, imperiled though it might feel itself to be, had never been larger, more prosperous, or more relatively secure. Simultaneously, the pathological behavior that results from extended impoverishment engulfed a large part of a black underclass that seemed unable to benefit from a certain opening up of American society that the civil rights movement had long envisioned and had finally made possible, if only for some. And for the first time ever, that inability to benefit seemed permanent.

Gangsterism became the handmaiden of hopelessness. Even middle-class children, well-educated, often, and well-heeled, found value in publicity celebrating a "gangsta" lifestyle. Cultural forms such as Rap and Hip Hop, "the CNN of the black community," valorized violence, homophobia, misogyny, anti-Semitism, and a curious form of masochistic self-destruction. And then life began to imitate art—the gangsterism of the art of Hip Hop liberalized itself in the reciprocal murders of Tupac and Biggie Smalls—and the

bizarre nightmare inversion of popular black values manifested itself in a most public way.

Which brings us to the present—for the African-American community, the best of times and the worst of times. We have the largest black middle class in our history and the largest black underclass. In 1990, 2,280,000 black men were in prison, or probation, or parole, while 23,000 earned a college degree. That's a ratio of 99 to 1, compared with a ratio of 6 to 1 for white men.

What do we do about this? What do we not do?

First of all, we have to stop feeling guilty about our success. Too many of us have what psychologists call "the guilt of the survivor," deep anxieties about leaving the rest of our fellow blacks in the inner city of despair. We need to feel the commitment to service, not to guilt. Our community and our families prepared us to be successful. "Get all the education you can," they told us over and over—and we did.

Second, we don't have to fail in order to be black. As odd and as crazy as this sounds. Far too many young black kids say that succeeding is "white." Had any of us said this sort of thing when we were growing up, our families and friends would have checked us into a mental institution. We need more success individually and collectively.

Third, we don't have to pretend any longer that 35 million people can ever possibly be members of the same economic class. The entire population of Canada is 27 million. Canadians are not all members of one economic class. Nor do they speak with one single voice, united behind one single leader. As each of us knows, we have never been members of one social or economic class and never will be. The best we can strive for is that the class differentials within the black community—the bell curve of class—cease their lopsided ratios because of the pernicious nature of racial inequality.

So how do we do this? How do we "fight the power" in a post-civil rights world in which Bull Connors and George Wallace are no longer the easy

targets? A world in which the rhetoric of the civil rights era sounds hollow and empty? A world in which race differences and class differentials have been ground together in a crucible of misery and squalor, in such a way that few of us can tell where one stops and the other begins? I certainly have no magic cures.

But we do know that the causes of poverty within the black community are both structural and behavioral. Scholars as diverse as philosopher Cornel West and sociologist William Julius Wilson have pointed this out, and we are foolish to deny it. A household composed of a 16-year-old mother, a 32-year-old grandmother, and a 48-year-old great grandmother cannot possibly be a site for hope and optimism. Our task, it seems to me, is to lobby for those social programs that have been demonstrated to make a difference for those motivated to seize these expanded opportunities.

More important, we have to demand a structural change in this country, the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for the cities. We have to take people off welfare, train them for occupations relevant to a 21st-century, high-tech economy, and put them to work. Joblessness, as Wilson maintains, is our biggest crisis.

And while I favor such incentives as tax breaks to generate new investment in inner cities, youth apprenticeships with corporations, expanded tax credits for earned income, and tenant ownership of inner-city property, we have to face the reality that most of our inner cities are simply not going to become overnight oases of prosperity. We should think about moving black inner-city workers to the jobs rather than hold our breath and wait for new factories to resettle in the inner city.

It is only by confronting the twin realities of white racism, on the one hand, and our failures to take the initiative and break the cycle of poverty, on the other, that we, the remnants of W. E. B. Du Bois's Talented Tenth, will be able to assume a renewed leadership role for, and with, the black community. To continue to repeat the same old stale formulas; to blame "the man" for

oppressing us all, in exactly the same ways; to scapegoat Koreans, Jews, or even Haitians for the failure of black Americans to seize local entrepreneurial opportunities is to fail to accept our role as leaders of our own community. Not to demand that each member of the black community accept individual responsibility for her or his behavior—whether that behavior assumes the form of black-on-black homicide, gang members violating the sanctity of the church, unprotected sexual activity, gangster rap lyrics, whatever—is for us to function merely as ethnic cheerleaders selling wool tickets from campus or suburbs, rather than saying the difficult things that may be unpopular with our fellows. Being a leader does not necessarily mean being loved; loving one's community means daring to risk estrangement and alienation from it in the short run in order to break the cycle of poverty and despair in which we find ourselves, over the long run. For what is at stake is nothing less than the survival of our country, and the African-American people themselves.

Those of us on campus can also reach out to those of us left behind on the streets. The historically black colleges and universities and Afro-American Studies departments in this country can institutionalize sophomore and junior year internships for community development through organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund. Together we can combat teenage pregnancies, black-on-black crime, and the spread of AIDS from drug abuse and unprotected sexual relations, and counter the spread of despair and hopelessness in our communities. Dr. King did not die so that half of us would make it, half of us perish, forever tarnishing two centuries of agitation for our equal rights. We, the members of the Talented Tenth, must accept our historical responsibility and live Dr. King's credo that none of us is free until all of us are free. And that all of us are brothers and sisters, as Dr. King said so long ago—white and black, Protestant and Catholic, Gentile and Jew and Muslim, rich and poor—even if we are not brothers-in-law. ■

BLACK A

BY CHRISTOPHER H. FOREMAN, JR.

From the beginning, “civil rights” was a misleading term, perhaps an outright misnomer. The moral, legal, and rhetorical pursuit of collective rights of access was but an essential strategy in a multifront war for a much larger prize: the uplift of a people, once mostly enslaved, afterward still widely despised. “Civil rights” could never mean just individual rights, any more than NAACP denoted a National Association for the Advancement of Coherent Principles. Indeed, black leaders and organizations have always known that they must pursue the vast and varied interests of their stigmatized and marginalized constituents by any realistic mechanism available. Rights were more a means than an end. If progress appears to have stalled, it is largely because the successive strategies embraced by the champions of racial uplift have all encountered their practical and political limits. For the most part these strategies have not so much failed as fallen victim to inevitable exhaustion and diminishing returns.

Everyone now recognizes that the strategy of securing basic legal access, pursued during an era of heroic civil rights advocacy, has long since run its course. As textbooks today routinely teach, that phase of the struggle began in the courts during the 1930s, shifting trajectory toward Congress a generation later as favorable public opinion, nurtured by a disciplined plea for simple justice and bouts of segregationist violence, made such a turn politically feasible. The basic access argument was simple and therefore potent. Individuals ought not to be proscribed, purely for reasons of color, from plainly quotidian activities available

to other citizens: voting for mayor, viewing a movie from a seat of one’s choosing, wolfing down a cheeseburger at a dime-store lunch counter. The great majority of white Americans had no particular affection for blacks, but had never felt the need for separate water fountains. Such relatively petty outrages proved hard to defend outside the Deep South. Thankfully, it has now been a long while since even most white southerners would have insisted that, say, Harvard’s distinguished Afro-Americanist Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ought not teach at a “white” university.

But the high moral perch afforded by

Christopher H. Foreman, Jr., is a senior fellow in the Brookings Governmental Studies Program and the author of The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice (Brookings, forthcoming).

MERICA



THE ROUGH ROAD TO RACIAL UPLIFT

WIKTOR SADOWSKI

the access agenda always had stringent limits, and they became apparent early. Formal doors to advancement might stand unlocked, perhaps even wide open, but how many black Americans would or could walk through? A Skip Gates might march off to Yale, but how many others would follow, especially if all the university did was mail out a brochure to Harlem with a road map to New Haven enclosed? Legally desegregated schools and workplaces could not, by themselves, yield diverse student bodies and workforces, much less ensure equal graduation and promotion rates.

Not surprisingly, as far back as the 1960s, the access agenda was giving way to rather less lofty (and still ongoing) haggles over dollars and numbers. Congress could target funds on numerous problems, creating new legal authorities when a favorable combination of support and indifference prevailed. A less openly democratic approach to black uplift lay in the dull machinery of administration, amidst the arcana of government regulations and guidance memoranda, subject to policing by the courts. Merely offering individualized redress for particular claimants according to each specific grievance appeared dreadfully inadequate to the scale of the social challenge—rather like restoring a beach by hauling in one grain of sand at a time. More institutionally aggressive efforts, formal and informal, seemed warranted.

Thus were born goals and timetables, minority contracting set-asides, and the entire regime of both “hard” (formal, mandated, quantitatively monitored) and “soft” (informal, voluntary, improvisational, hortatory) affirmative action. (This writer is a product of that regime. Every professional appointment and educational credential I have held would likely have been unattainable absent the—mostly informal—bestowal of crucial “breaks” tied at least implicitly to my race. For what it’s worth, I have felt no attendant stigma. That’s because of my own sense that most success in life is a matter of breaks exploited via work—a very American intuition.)

Advocates for black uplift heard a new and disturbing thunder in the distance as far back as the mid-1960s. Early lightning struck as a government report entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Crafted by then-Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the report suggested serious new tears in black America’s social fabric that might widen in time. But neither a leadership anchored securely in the safe harbor of its access-affirmative action agenda, nor the increasingly strident voices gathering under the Black Power rubric, were in any mood to hear some Irishman’s embarrassing prattle about “Negro family structure,” however plainly sympathetic and data-laden. America’s social policy researchers have been making up for considerable lost time as a result.

This issue of the *Brookings Review* reflects a sense that on racial matters the American condition is overall dramatically improved, but far more complicated than it used to seem, and in important respects continually depressing. A significant black middle class has emerged (and not solely through affirmative action). White racial attitudes are astonishingly transformed from where they stood during Franklin Roosevelt’s

presidency, when lynching blacks was still an informally listed entrée on the menu of southern civic entertainments.

Yet some devilishly tenacious ills remain, for which neither access nor affirmative action is satisfactory medicine: low skills and abysmal test scores among minority youngsters; opportunity-sapping teenage pregnancies; the vastly disproportionate involvement of black males with the criminal justice system; the lure of drug money and addiction among the black underclass. A foray into the Brookings library recently yielded a new issue of the *Journal of Human Resources*, in which Howard S. Bloom and several collaborators assess the Job Training and Partnership Act’s income effects for adults and out-of-school youths. Since I had not seen the results of the National JTPA Study trumpeted across the front page of the *Washington Post*, I should have known what was coming. Still, I winced at what I read (emphasis below added):

Findings from the National JTPA Study parallel those from the few other studies of employment and training programs that have employed experimental designs. The *modest positive impacts* on earnings experienced by adult women...are consistent with the impacts observed by previous randomized studies of work-welfare programs....The *modest positive impacts* experienced by adult men...are consistent with the impacts observed for men by the several existing randomized studies of programs for displaced workers....

For out-of-school youths, there is a *disturbingly consistent lack of program earnings gains across several major studies*....

For adults, we still do not know what works best for whom.... For out-of-school youths, we are at a more primitive stage in our understanding of how to increase labor market success; we *have not found any way to do so*....

But it will not help to seek refuge in comfortable fictions. The genuine racism that lingers in white America is not a primary cause of these difficulties, and the view that “nothing has fundamentally changed” on America’s racial landscape is insupportable. In their book *America in Black and White*, Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom opine that such a flat-Earth view of white attitudes “can only be held by those who believe that social science evidence is worthless.”

Actually, as even they realize, that is too simple an explanation for overreliance on the rhetorical hammer of “racism.” For many African Americans, “racism” is simply an intuitively appealing way to make sense of a complicated and disturbing social and economic milieu. Resort to “racism” (which takes its most extreme form as belief in anti-black conspiracies) is fundamentally symptomatic of a deeply frustrated popular groping for answers to questions triggered, ironically, by the vanquishing of the old racial order and by the failure of rising tides to lift all ships and wash away all problems. Indeed, the burial of Jim Crow was followed by social challenges that scarcely seemed to exist when it was alive. This may help per-

suade some African Americans that a malicious chicanery must be afoot.

For activists and the intelligentsia, “racism” offers obvious political leverage for claiming the moral high ground and sustaining pressure for social change. Trouble is, there is just enough real racism left to render “racism” both a plausible explanation to the black masses and a convenient advocacy fulcrum for black elites.

African-American leadership may be frustrated, but it is not stupid. Its members doubtless appreciate that the current malaise afflicting poor blacks is largely a concomitant of forces like middle-class residential and educational choices and broader economic developments. (When Jim Crow flourished, it was far more commonly possible for a man with no education beyond the primary grades to feed a family.) One also detects, especially among black clergy, a grim awareness that personal and collective values, not just skill acquisition, are essential to strong communities and enhanced life chances. But the leadership game also dictates that one play with the cards available, and the “race card” can be hard to resist, even when inappropriate. Just ask New York City’s indefatigable Al Sharpton.

We need hard and courageous thinking about the complex array of troubles that plague the black community and the nation, but we do not suffer for lack of chatter about race. Any careful empirical study of the attention accorded race in both the electronic and print media would surely find impressive amounts of race-related news, as well as opinion reflecting every conceivable viewpoint. We may not always be completely forthright with one another, but the subject is never very far off any sentient citizen’s radar screen. As Donald Horowitz recently remarked, Americans today may be enduring a serious case of “race fatigue.”

We *do* lack both crucial knowledge (about how to produce various positive policy effects) and the political consensus essential to making available dramatically increased resources for ambitious policy initiatives. It is unclear that franker interracial talk, however desirable, will spur much change on either front. If anyone can lead a probing national seminar on race, surely that person is President Clinton. But even he is all too aware that presidents are most likely to spark successful conversations when “success” has a narrow and precise meaning—such as adoption of a Civil Rights Act or a Strategic Defense Initiative.

Affirmative action certainly warrants hard thinking, though enduring disagreement on that front appears inescapable. Our collective attachment to the notion of meritocracy, of individually earned rewards, runs deep. The ideals of colorblindness

and racial diversity remain hard to reconcile, at least for the present. As Harvard Law Professor Christopher Edley argues in a recent volume, the subject is far more complex than simple slogans allow. Unfortunately, that is true even of the slogan coined by Edley’s former boss, President Clinton: “mend it, don’t end it.” As a nation we are not going to dispense with affirmative action entirely. Nor do we wish to. Aggressive outreach and job training targeted at African Americans stir controversy mainly by falling short of their announced goals. And corporate America is reasonably content with the status quo, as the Reagan administration quickly discovered.

But some varieties of affirmative action (such as race-normed tests and further breaks for the already conspicuously advantaged) have proved difficult to defend. One specific approach in need of mending is any academic admissions process that displaces deserving white candidates to make room for minorities with weaker credentials who cannot or do not complete the program to which they’ve been admitted. As an affront to both efficiency and justice, failures of this sort ought to concern conservatives and liberals alike. To the degree that a policy slips toward all cost and no benefit, it would appear perverse by definition. Moreover, the Clinton administration’s mantra that “quotas are illegal” may be disingenuous if de facto quotas (which afford the advantage of hard targets to aim for) operate in place of legal ones.

But how common are such defects in the affirmative action universe? More common, one suspects, are efforts that regularly spawn both successes and failures, and where a quota smear won’t easily stick. The obvious example of a Colin Powell, who redeems whatever jumpstart he may have enjoyed through distinguished performance, is bound to give even some affirmative action critics a moment’s hesitation. That’s clearly why President Clinton tried to squeeze Abigail Thernstrom with the Powell example during a televised town hall meeting on race last December.

Possibly the most insidious effect of the affirmative action furor is to shift precious time in the national spotlight away from our low-income black citizens, whose long-term fates merit the hardest thinking of all. Affirmative action, a boon to middle-class blacks like me, promises little help on that front. Nor does the continuing university-based mudwrestle over multiculturalism. The symposium in this issue of the *Brookings Review* concentrates specifically on what might be called “the black predicament.” This represents another conscious editorial choice, grounded in the conviction that the great social question of the new millenium is less likely to be “can we all get along?” than “can we all get ahead?” ■

Possibly the most insidious effect of the affirmative action furor is to shift precious time in the national spotlight away from our low-income black citizens whose long-term fates merit the hardest thinking of all.

BLACK P

BY ABIGAIL THERNSTROM
AND STEPHAN THERNSTROM

Let's start with a few contrasting numbers.

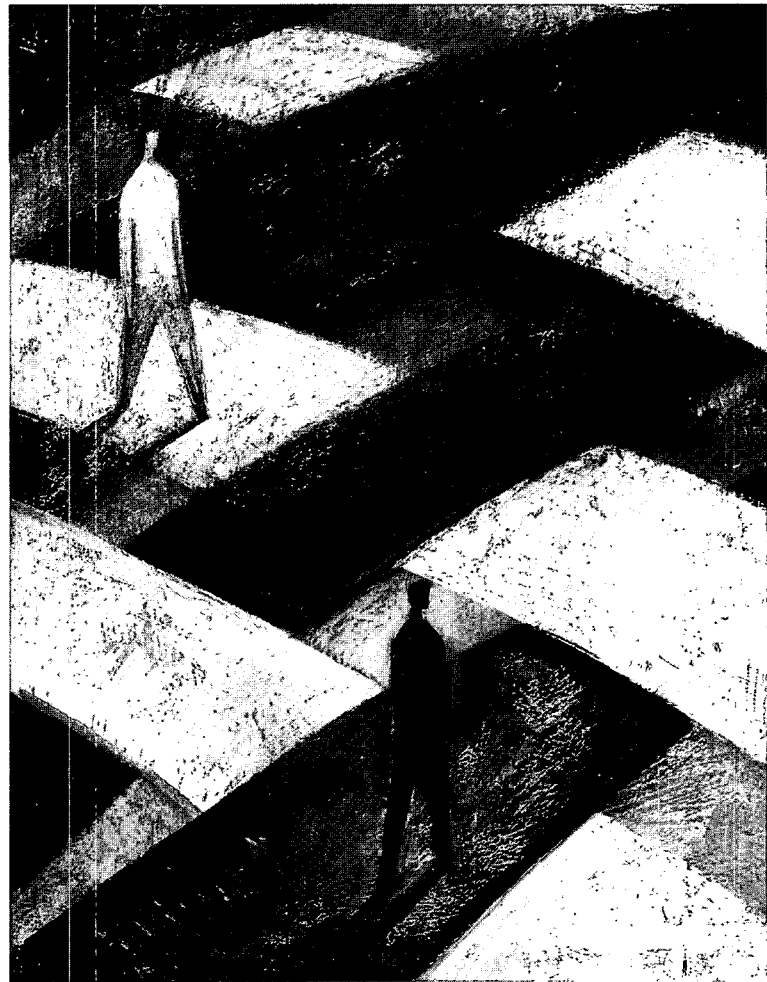
60 AND 2.2. IN 1940, 60 PERCENT OF EMPLOYED BLACK WOMEN WORKED AS DOMESTIC SERVANTS; TODAY THE NUMBER IS DOWN TO 2.2 PERCENT, WHILE 60 PERCENT HOLD WHITE-COLLAR JOBS.

44 AND 1. IN 1958, 44 PERCENT OF WHITES SAID THEY WOULD MOVE IF A BLACK FAMILY BECAME THEIR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR; TODAY THE FIGURE IS 1 PERCENT.

18 AND 86. IN 1964, THE YEAR THE GREAT CIVIL RIGHTS ACT WAS PASSED, ONLY 18 PERCENT OF WHITES CLAIMED TO HAVE A FRIEND WHO WAS BLACK; TODAY 86 PERCENT SAY THEY DO, WHILE 87 PERCENT OF BLACKS ASSERT THEY HAVE WHITE FRIENDS.

Progress is the largely suppressed story of race and race relations over the past half-century. And thus it's news that more than 40 percent of African Americans now consider themselves members of the middle class. Forty-two percent own their own homes, a figure that rises to 75 percent if we look just at black married couples. Black two-parent families earn only 13 percent less than those who are white. Almost a third of the black population lives in suburbia.

Because these are facts the media seldom report, the black underclass continues to define black America in the view of much of the public. Many



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assume blacks live in ghettos, often in high-rise public housing projects. Crime and the welfare check are seen as their main source of income. The stereotype crosses racial lines. Blacks are even more prone than whites to exaggerate the extent to which African Americans are trapped in inner-city poverty. In a 1991 Gallup poll, about one-fifth of all whites, but almost half of black respondents, said that at least three out of four African Americans were impoverished urban residents. And yet, in reality, blacks who consider themselves to be middle class outnumber those with incomes below the poverty line by a wide margin.

PROGRESS

HOW FAR WE'VE COME—AND HOW

A FIFTY-YEAR MARCH OUT OF POVERTY

Fifty years ago most blacks were indeed trapped in poverty, although they did not reside in inner cities. When Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma* in 1944, most blacks lived in the South and on the land as laborers and sharecroppers. (Only one in eight owned the land on which he worked.) A trivial 5 percent of black men nationally were engaged in nonmanual, white-collar work of any kind; the vast majority held ill-paid, insecure, manual jobs—jobs that few whites would take. As already noted, six out of ten African-American women were household servants who, driven by economic desperation, often worked 12-hour days for pathetically low wages. Segregation in the South and discrimination in the North did create a sheltered market for some black businesses (funeral homes, beauty parlors, and the like) that served a black community barred from patronizing “white” establishments. But the number was minuscule.

Beginning in the 1940s, however, deep demographic and economic change, accompanied by a marked shift in white racial attitudes, started blacks down the road to much greater equality. New Deal legislation, which set minimum wages and hours and eliminated the incentive of southern employers to hire low-wage black workers, put a damper on further industrial development in the region. In addition, the trend toward mechanized agriculture and a diminished demand for American cotton in the face of international competition combined to displace blacks from the land.

As a consequence, with the shortage of workers

in northern manufacturing plants following the outbreak of World War II, southern blacks in search of jobs boarded trains and buses in a Great Migration that lasted through the mid-1960s. They found what they were looking for: wages so strikingly high that in 1953 the average income for a black family in the North was almost twice that of those who remained in the South. And through much of the 1950s wages rose steadily and unemployment was low.

Thus by 1960 only one out of seven black men still labored on the land, and almost a quarter were in white-collar or skilled manual occupations. Another 24 percent had semiskilled factory jobs that meant membership in the stable working class, while the proportion of black women working as servants had been cut in half. Even those who did not move up into higher-ranking jobs were doing much better.

A decade later, the gains were even more striking. From 1940 to 1970, black men cut the income gap by about a third, and by 1970 they were earning (on average) roughly 60 percent of what white men took in. The advancement of black women was even more impressive. Black life expectancy went up dramatically, as did black homeownership rates. Black college enrollment also rose—by 1970 to about 10 percent of the total, three times the prewar figure.

In subsequent years these trends continued, although at a more leisurely pace. For instance, today more than 30 percent of black men and

FAR
WE
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GO

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nearly 60 percent of black women hold white-collar jobs. Whereas in 1970 only 2.2 percent of American physicians were black, the figure is now 4.5 percent. But while the fraction of black families with middle-class incomes rose almost 40 percentage points between 1940 and 1970, it has inched up only another 10 points since then.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DOESN'T WORK

Rapid change in the status of blacks for several decades followed by a definite slowdown that begins just when affirmative action policies get their start: that story certainly seems to suggest that racial preferences have enjoyed an inflated reputation. "There's one simple reason to support affirmative action," an op-ed writer in the *New York Times* argued in 1995. "It works." That is the voice of conventional wisdom.

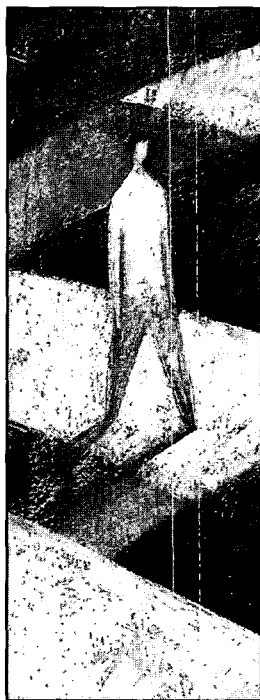
In fact, not only did significant advances predate the affirmative action era, but the benefits of race-conscious politics are not clear. Important differences (a slower overall rate of economic growth, most notably) separate the pre-1970 and post-1970 periods, making comparison difficult.

We know only this: some gains are probably attributable to race-conscious educational and employment policies. The number of black college and university professors more than doubled between 1970 and 1990; the number of physicians tripled; the number of engineers almost quadrupled; and the number of attorneys increased more than sixfold. Those numbers undoubtedly do reflect the fact that the nation's professional schools changed their admissions criteria for black applicants, accepting and often providing financial aid to African-American students whose academic records were much weaker than those of many white and Asian-American applicants whom these schools were turning down. Preferences "worked" for these beneficiaries, in that they were given seats in the classroom that they would not have won in the absence of racial double standards.

On the other hand, these professionals make up a small fraction of the total black middle class. And their numbers would have grown without preferences, the historical record strongly suggests. In addition, the greatest economic gains for African Americans since the early 1960s were in the years 1965 to 1975 and occurred mainly in the South, as economists John J. Donahue III and James Heckman have found. In fact, Donahue and Heckman discovered "virtually no improvement" in the wages of black men relative to those of white men outside of the South over the entire period from 1963 to 1987, and southern gains, they concluded, were mainly due to the powerful antidiscrimination provisions in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

With respect to federal, state, and municipal set-asides, as well, the jury is still out. In 1994 the state of Maryland decided that at least 10 percent of the contracts it awarded

would go to minority- and female-owned firms. It more than met its goal. The program therefore "worked" if the goal was merely the narrow one of dispensing cash to a particular, designated group. But how well do these sheltered businesses survive long-term without extraordinary protection from free-market competition? And with almost 30 percent of black families still living in poverty, what is their trickle-down effect? On neither score is the picture reassuring. Programs are often fraudulent, with white contractors offering minority firms 15 percent of the profit with no obligation to do any of the work. Alternatively, set-asides enrich those with the right connections. In Richmond, Virginia, for instance, the main effect of the ordinance was a marriage of political convenience—a working alliance between the economically privileged of both races. The white business elite signed on to a piece-of-the-pie for blacks in order to polish its image as socially conscious and secure support for the downtown revitalization it wanted. Black politicians used the bargain to suggest their own importance to low-income constituents for whom the set-asides actually did little. Neither cared whether the policy in fact provided real economic benefits—which it didn't.



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WHY HAS THE ENGINE OF PROGRESS STALLED?

In the decades since affirmative action policies were first instituted, the poverty rate has remained basically unchanged. Despite black gains by numerous other measures, close to 30 percent of black families still live below the poverty line. "There are those who say, my fellow Americans, that even good affirmative action programs are no longer needed," President Clinton said in July 1995. But "let us consider," he went on, that "the unemployment rate for African Americans remains about twice that of whites." Racial preferences are the president's answer to persistent inequality, although a quarter-century of affirmative action has done nothing whatever to close the unemployment gap.

Persistent inequality is obviously serious, and if discrimination were the primary problem, then race-conscious remedies might be appropriate. But while white racism was central to the story in 1964, today the picture is much more complicated. Thus while blacks and whites now graduate at the same rate from high school today and are almost equally likely to attend college, on average they are not equally educated. That is, looking at years of schooling in assessing the racial gap in family income tells us little about the cognitive skills whites and blacks bring to the job market. And cognitive skills obviously affect earnings.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the nation's report card on what American students attending elementary and secondary schools know. Those tests show

that African-American students, on average, are alarmingly far behind whites in math, science, reading, and writing. For instance, black students at the end of their high school career are almost four years behind white students in reading; the gap is comparable in other subjects. A study of 26- to 33-year-old men who held full-time jobs in 1991 thus found that when education was measured by years of school completed, blacks earned 19 percent less than comparably educated whites. But when word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, arithmetical reasoning, and mathematical knowledge became the yardstick, the results were reversed. Black men earned 9 percent more than white men with the same education—that is, the same performance on basic tests.

Other research suggests much the same point. For instance, the work of economists Richard J. Murnane and Frank Levy has demonstrated the increasing importance of cognitive skills in our changing economy. Employers in firms like Honda now require employees who can read and do math problems at the ninth-grade level at a minimum. And yet the 1992 NAEP math tests, for example, revealed that only 22 percent of African-American high school seniors but 58 percent of their white classmates were numerate enough for such firms to consider hiring them. And in reading, 47 percent of whites in 1992 but just 18 percent of African Americans could handle the printed word well enough to be employable in a modern automobile plant. Murnane and Levy found a clear impact on income. Not years spent in school but strong skills made for high long-term earnings.

THE WIDENING SKILLS GAP

Why is there such a glaring racial gap in levels of educational attainment? It is not easy to say. The gap, in itself, is very bad news, but even more alarming is the fact that it has been widening in recent years. In 1971, the average African-American 17-year-old could read no better than the typical white child who was six years younger. The racial gap in math in 1973 was 4.3 years; in science it was 4.7 years in 1970. By the late 1980s, however, the picture was notably brighter. Black students in their final year

of high school were only 2.5 years behind whites in both reading and math and 2.1 years behind on tests of writing skills.

Had the trends of those years continued, by today black pupils would be performing about as well as their white classmates. Instead, black progress came to a halt, and serious backsliding began. Between 1988 and 1994, the racial gap in reading grew from 2.5 to 3.9 years; between 1990 and 1994, the racial gap in math increased from 2.5 to 3.4 years. In both science and writing, the racial gap has widened by a full year.

There is no obvious explanation for this alarming turnaround. The early gains doubtless had much to do with the growth of the black middle class, but the black middle class did not suddenly begin to shrink in the late 1980s. The poverty rate was not dropping significantly when educational progress was occurring, nor was it on the increase when the racial gap began once again to widen. The huge rise in out-of-wedlock births and the steep and steady decline in the proportion of black children growing

up with two parents do not explain the fluctuating educational performance of African-American children. It is well established that children raised in single-parent families do less well in school than others, even when all other variables, including income, are controlled. But the disintegration of the black nuclear family—presciently noted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan as early as 1965—was occurring rapidly in the period in which black scores were rising, so it cannot be invoked as the main explanation as to why scores began to fall many years later.

Some would argue that the initial educational gains were the result of increased racial integration and the growth of such federal compensatory education programs as Head Start. But neither desegregation nor compensatory education seems to have increased the cognitive skills of the black children exposed to them. In any case, the racial mix in the typical school has not changed in recent years, and the number of students in compensatory programs and the dollars spent on them have kept going up.

What about changes in the curriculum and patterns of course selection by students? The educational reform movement that began in the late 1970s did succeed in pushing students into a “New Basics” core curriculum that included more English, science, math, and social studies courses. And

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there is good reason to believe that taking tougher courses contributed to the temporary rise in black test scores. But this explanation, too, nicely fits the facts for the period before the late 1980s but not the very different picture thereafter. The number of black students going through “New Basics” courses did not decline after 1988, pulling down their NAEP scores.

We are left with three tentative suggestions. First, the increased violence and disorder of inner-city lives that came with the introduction of crack cocaine and the drug-related gang wars in the mid-1980s most likely had something to do with the reversal of black educational progress. Chaos in the streets and within schools affects learning inside and outside the classroom.

In addition, an educational culture that has increasingly turned teachers into guides who help children explore whatever interests they may have affected black academic performance as well. As educational critic E. D. Hirsch, Jr., has pointed out, the “deep aversion to and contempt for factual knowledge that pervade the thinking of American educators” means that students fail to build the “intellectual capital” that is the foundation of all further learning. That will be particularly true of those students who come to school most academically disadvantaged—those whose homes are not, in effect, an additional school. The deficiencies of American education hit hardest those most in need of education.

And yet in the name of racial sensitivity, advocates for minority students too often dismiss both common academic standards and standardized tests as culturally biased and judgmental. Such advocates have plenty of company. Christopher Edley, Jr., professor of law at Harvard and President Clinton’s point man on affirmative action, for instance, has allied himself with testing critics, labeling preferences the tool colleges are forced to use “to correct the problems we’ve inflicted on ourselves with our testing standards.” Such tests can be abolished—or standards lowered—but once the disparity in cognitive skills becomes less evident, it is harder to correct.

Closing that skills gap is obviously the first task if black advancement is to continue at its once-fast pace. On the map of racial progress, education is



If all our efforts as a nation to resolve the “American dilemma” have been in vain—if we’ve been spinning our wheels in the rut of ubiquitous and permanent racism, as Derrick Bell, Andrew Hacker, and others argue—then racial equality is a hopeless task, an unattainable ideal.



the name of almost every road. Raise the level of black educational performance, and the gap in college graduation rates, in attendance at selective professional schools, and in earnings is likely to close as well. Moreover, with educational parity, the whole issue of racial preferences disappears.

THE ROAD TO TRUE EQUALITY

Black progress over the past half-century has been impressive, conventional wisdom to the contrary notwithstanding. And yet the nation has many miles to go on the road to true racial equality. “I wish I could say that racism and prejudice were only distant memories, but as I look around I see that even educated whites and African Americans...have lost hope in equality,” Thurgood Marshall said in

1992. A year earlier *The Economist* magazine had reported the problem of race as one of “shattered dreams.” In fact, all hope has not been “lost,” and “shattered” was much too strong a word, but certainly in the 1960s the civil rights community failed to anticipate just how tough the voyage would be. (Thurgood Marshall had

envisioned an end to all school segregation within five years of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.) Many blacks, particularly, are now discouraged. A 1997 Gallup poll found a sharp decline in optimism since 1980; only 33 percent of blacks (versus 58 percent of whites) thought both the quality of life for blacks and race relations had gotten better.

Thus, progress—by many measures seemingly so clear—is viewed as an illusion, the sort of fantasy to which intellectuals are particularly prone. But the ahistorical sense of nothing gained is in itself bad news. Pessimism is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If all our efforts as a nation to resolve the “American dilemma” have been in vain—if we’ve been spinning our wheels in the rut of ubiquitous and permanent racism, as Derrick Bell, Andrew Hacker, and others argue—then racial equality is a hopeless task, an unattainable ideal. If both blacks and whites understand and celebrate the gains of the past, however, we will move forward with the optimism, insight, and energy that further progress surely demands. ■

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IN THE WORKPLACE, as in many aspects of their lives, Afro-Americans as a group are systematically unconnected to the essential network resources that most other Americans take for granted. Their workplace isolation involves far more than the impenetrable "glass ceilings" associated with the nation's boardrooms. It is pervasive, hampering working-class laborers seeking well-paying jobs on a construction work crew just as it does upwardly mobile college graduates.

This isolation can be addressed, but only partially, by access to improved educational opportunities. Such opportunities might be able to compensate for network deficiencies in the long run, mainly through introducing Afro-American students to other students with wider network ranges, but the process is painfully slow. For a group as unconnected as Afro-Americans, it may take

multiple generations. Speeding up this process requires affirmative action.

HOW NETWORKS WORK

The fundamental insight of network sociologists is that characteristics of a person's network of ties to others structure the flow of information that both socializes him as he grows up and provides social resources critical for competent functioning as an adult. Economic behavior in particular, as noted by Mark Granovetter in *Getting a Job*, is "heavily embedded in other social processes that closely constrain and determine its course and results." Without denying the importance of individual attributes in accounting for success, network sociologists nevertheless consider past and present structures of network ties and their attendant information flows to be of at least equal importance in explaining a person's achievements. As sociologists Nan Lin, Walter Ensel, and John Vaughn explain, the network approach "challenges the assumption that the labor market is

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Opening Up Workplace Networks to Afro-Americans

BY ORLANDO PATTERSON

essentially an open and competitive arena where specifications for a job and the necessary skills and competence are easily matched and where information about job and applicant availability is widely diffused.”

Karen Campbell, Peter Marsden, and Jeanne Hurlbert have demonstrated that networks operate as crucial resources for individuals in three ways. First, they help them to find a job, a home, or even a spouse. Second, they provide access to influential people. And, finally, they promote bargaining skills that enlarge the range and influence of networks even more. As Granovetter notes, “...careers are not made up of random jumps from one job to another, but rather...individuals rely on contacts acquired at various stages of their work-life and before. One important result of this is that mobility appears to be self-generating: the more different social and work settings one moves through, the larger the reservoir of personal contacts he has who may mediate further mobility.”

BUILDING NETWORKS

No ethnic group has ever achieved success in America by relying solely on education. Instead, immigrants—even ethnic groups that have powerful religious and social sanctions against such inter-ethnic bonding—have been able to make inroads into established American networks. Welcomed to the neighborhoods, clubs, and churches of existing groups, newcomers have quickly been able to develop the ties that extend their network ranges, especially in job searches and in getting credit for mortgages and small businesses.

Ethnic intermarriages have also contributed to immigrants’ success, both by extending their range of network ties and by involving them in new dense networks of strong affinal ties. Intermarriage enhances network bargaining skills in two ways: it encourages creative thinking about networking (imagine a Jewish groom’s first Sunday dinner with his Italian wife’s family), and it teaches traditions of network bargaining peculiar to the spouse’s ethnic group. More broadly, intermarriage encourages cultural and intellectual innovation. The explosive growth of artistic, scientific, technical, and entrepreneurial innovations in the United States is certainly linked to the high rate of intermarriage of its ethnic groups.

Afro-Americans, however, have been almost completely isolated from this national process. They are, for example, residentially isolated (see tables 1 and 2). As Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton, authors of *American Apartheid*, note of the data in table 1, “The isolation indices reveal the full extent of black racial seclusion within U.S. metropolitan areas, both northern and southern. The average value changed little over the decade and remained close to 66% in both regions; and in 1980 no metropolitan area displayed an isolation index under 50%. Despite the legal banning of discrimination and the apparent easing of white racial hostility, blacks and whites were still very unlikely to share a neighborhood within most metropolitan areas. In many cases, the degree of black spatial isolation was

Table 1. Trends in Black Segregation in Selected Metropolitan Areas with Large Black Populations, 1970–80

Metropolitan Area	Black-white segregation		Black isolation	
	1970	1980	1970	1980
North				
Boston	81.2	77.6	56.7	55.1
Chicago	91.9	87.8	85.5	82.8
Detroit	88.4	86.7	75.9	77.3
Los Angeles	91.0	81.1	70.3	60.4
New York	81.0	82.0	58.8	62.7
Philadelphia	79.5	78.8	68.2	69.6
South				
Atlanta	82.1	78.5	78.0	74.8
Birmingham	37.8	40.8	45.1	50.2
Dallas	86.9	77.1	76.0	64.0
Memphis	75.9	71.6	78.0	75.9
Miami	85.1	77.8	75.2	64.2
Washington	81.1	70.1	77.2	68.0

Source: Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Harvard, 1993).

Black-white segregation is measured by an index of dissimilarity, which gives the percentage of blacks who would have to move to achieve an “even” residential pattern—one in which every neighborhood replicates the racial composition of the city. Black isolation is measured by an index that measures the degree to which Afro-Americans reside in neighborhoods that are mainly Afro-American: the index is 100 where all Afro-Americans live in exclusively Afro-American neighborhoods; it is less than 50 where they live in neighborhoods that are more Euro-American than Afro-American.

extreme.” There are, to be sure, some positive signs. Table 2 indicates modest recent improvement in some cities. And a surprising level of interracial contact, mainly originating at work, has been reported in polls despite the continued spatial segregation. Even so, it is astonishing that after living almost three centuries in this country, Afro-Americans have remained so spatially isolated.

Partly related to the group’s spatial segregation is its marital

isolation. The intermarriage rates of Afro-Americans with non-Afro-Americans are far lower than those of other ethnic groups. Researchers often express the extent of intermarriage in terms of the proportion of women in a given group who marry men from other groups. But that measure is misleading because it fails to take account of compositional factors such as the relative sizes of the groups involved. A much better approach, that taken by Stanley Lieberson and Mary Waters in *From Many Strands*, is to measure intermarriage in terms of the rate that would be expected if spouses were chosen randomly in the population. Column 1 of table 3 shows that Afro-American women have by far the highest in-marriage rate of all ethnic groups. But this figure grossly underestimates the true level of isolation by not taking account of the proportion of all Americans who are Afro-American. Column 2, the proportion of husbands of each ethnic group in the population as a whole,

No ethnic group has ever achieved success in America by relying solely on education. Instead, immigrants have been able to make inroads into established American networks.

Table 2. Trends in Black Segregation in Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1980-90

	1980		1990
Metropolitan area	Black-white segregation	Metropolitan area	Black-white segregation
Most segregated			
Bradenton FL	91	Gary IN	91
Chicago IL	91	Detroit MI	89
Gary IN	90	Chicago IL	87
Sarasota FL	90	Cleveland OH	86
Cleveland OH	89	Buffalo NY	84
Detroit MI	89	Flint MI	84
Least segregated			
Fayetteville NC	43	Clarksville TN	42
Lawton OK	43	Lawrence KS	41
Anchorage AL	42	Fayetteville NC	41
Danville VA	41	Anchorage AL	38
Lawrence KS	38	Lawton OK	37
Jacksonville NC	36	Jacksonville NC	31

Source: Reynolds Farley and William H. Frey, "Changes in the Segregation of Whites from Blacks During the 1980s: Small Steps Toward a More Integrated Society," *American Sociological Review*, 1994 (vol. 59: pp. 23-45).

For the definition of black-white segregation, see notes to table 1.

is the proportion of such husbands we would expect to find in each ethnic group under conditions of random marital choice. The proportion of Afro-American husbands in the population as a whole, 7.4 percent, is what the in-marriage rate of Afro-American women would be if marital choices were random. Column 3 shows the ratio of in- to out-marriages (for Afro-American women, 74.4). Here we begin to see the true extent of Afro-American marital isolation. Column 4, the ratio of husbands within each group to husbands outside the group for all women outside the group, indicates that the ratio of Afro-American husbands to non-Afro-American husbands for all non-Afro-American women is .002. Column 5—the odds ratio derived from the ratios of Afro-American to non-Afro-American women's marital choices—is the best measure of Afro-American marital isolation. It tells us, quite simply, that the odds that an Afro-American woman will marry an Afro-American man are 32,998 times greater than that a non-Afro-American woman will marry an Afro-American man! Compare this ratio with the odds ratios of other ethnic groups.

Further evidence on Afro-American isolation comes from sociological studies of Americans' "core" networks—those people with whom they discuss "important matters." The 1985 General Social Survey—the first nationwide sample of core network data—found striking racial and ethnic homogeneity in these networks. (The enormous liability of Afro-American marital isolation becomes even clearer when we learn that the typical American core network is small and centered on kin.) Significant variations, however, exist across subgroups. Not surprisingly, whites have the largest networks, Afro-Americans the smallest. One troubling finding of this and other studies is that, contrary to the identity rhetoric of Afro-American leaders and the claims of many sociologists, Afro-Americans do not compensate for their isolation from other groups by relying more heavily on kinsmen. To the contrary, as Peter Marsden, a preeminent network scholar, notes, "black respondents cited fewer kin and fewer non-kin than whites did, and their networks have a lower proportion of kin than those of whites."

ENTER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Affirmative action can best be seen as a medium-term strategy to supplement and expedite the long-term educational solution to the unfair isolation of Afro-Americans. It directly addresses and compensates for their network liability by inserting them into the network-rich educational institutions of the nation and the self-generating career networks at the workplace—networks that Euro-Americans take for granted.

Affirmative action in the educational sector builds networks in several ways. First, it helps youngsters gain skills. Defenders of affirmative action usually emphasize this role, but such a strategy cannot justify why students from disadvantaged backgrounds should be at the nation's elite colleges if adequate educational alternatives exist for them that are congruent with their educational records. Indeed, as a bigger fish in a smaller pond, a talented Afro-American student may well acquire more purely technical skills at a good state institution than at Harvard.

But while educators are loath to admit it, elite educational

institutions serve two primary functions: to recruit and educate the nation's elite and to provide an environment in which students initiate and extend elite networks and learn network negotiating skills. Living and learning with students from elite environments helps establish wide-ranging links with elite networks, as well as dense links through intermarriages.

Given what we now know about the true nature of labor markets, it should be clear that only some form of affirmative action could have inserted Afro-Americans into the more working- and middle-class jobs on a significant scale. Economists often express bewilderment at the failure of Afro-Americans' qualifications to match up with their earnings. That a Euro-American construction worker with a high school degree earns more than the typical Afro-American college graduate must be a source of endless disciplinary frustration for those who believe that the price system should match up workers of equal qualifications with jobs paying equal wages. As readers of

this essay will know, however, there is an answer to this puzzle: networks.

Mark Granovetter's description of the utility of networks in

Getting a Job provides an excellent rationale for affirmative action intervention in the labor market: "Especially important to recognize, moreover, is the self-maintaining aspect of personal contact systems. Blacks are at a disadvantage in using channels of job information not because they have failed to 'develop an informal structure' suitable to the need, but because they are presently under-represented in the structure of employment itself. If those presently employed in a given industry or firm have no black friends, no blacks will enter those settings through personal contacts. Once a core of blacks (or whatever group in question) has become established, however, a multiplier effect can be anticipated, as they recruit friends and relatives, who do the same, and so on. Once achieved, this situation is self-sustaining." Since Granovetter wrote this in 1974, a great deal has been achieved, thanks in good part to precisely this effect of affirmative action. And, in fact, Granovetter offers not only a rationale for affirmative action but a way of judging where and when it has fulfilled its purpose. Affirmative action can and perhaps should be discontinued in any firm that has achieved this self-sustaining recruitment process for minority workers. The self-sustaining group, I would add, need not coincide with the proportion of the disadvantaged group in the population at large.

Another important area of economic justice that can

Affirmative action inserts Afro-Americans into the network-rich educational institutions of the nation and the self-generating career networks at the workplace—networks that Euro-Americans take for granted.

Table 3. Intermarriage Rates, American-Born Women in Their First Marriage, 1980

Group	Women	All	In-out ratio		Odds ratio
	in-married	husbands	Group	Others	
English	56.1%	24.7%	1.29	1.67	7.7
German	48.6	24.5	0.94	0.21	4.6
Irish	39.5	17.9	0.65	0.15	4.5
French	21.4	5.4	0.27	0.05	6.0
Italian	39.5	5.2	0.65	0.03	19.0
Polish	29.8	3.7	0.42	0.03	15.5
Swedish	13.2	2.1	0.15	0.02	8.1
Black	98.7	7.4	74.41	0.002	32,998.0
Mexican	76.0	1.7	3.18	0.004	742.7
Puerto-Rican	78.7	0.4	3.70	0.001	3,468.0

Source: Stanley Lieberson and Mary G. Waters, *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1988).

be remedied only by affirmative action pertains to the role of networks in both the internal and external structure of organizations—particularly in middle- and upper-level employment decisions. Organizations, including business firms, rely heavily on informal networks both for the internal structuring of information and decisionmaking and for links with related organizations. At all levels there is not only a tacit culture at play—knowledge of how things really work as distinct from what the job descriptions and work manuals say—but vital network contacts to be made and important network negotiating skills to be learned if one is to effectively mobilize critical network figures and links within and between organizations. Minorities and women are often unconnected to such knowledge and links and may never stand a chance of acquiring them—because they are made, nurtured, and extended precisely in those places where disadvantaged minorities and women are not to be found.

This problem is commonly mentioned, so there is no need to belabor it except to note one important point. The higher up a hierarchy one goes, the more important network factors become in recruitment decisions. An unprejudiced personnel officer bound by a color- or gender-blind code, but alert to the organizational need for persons with the right network skills, will always be obliged to reject applicants from backgrounds with impoverished network resources. The costs are simply too high to train such people. Where then are these skills to be acquired? They can come only from organizations being pressured or provided with governmental incentives to train people in these skills until a critical mass of them exists.

COSTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All social policies incur costs, and affirmative action is no exception. The costs to individual Euro-Americans have been so thoroughly discussed that there is no need to repeat them here. One way to minimize the costs is to recognize three basic principles emerging from court decisions as identified by Jim D. Newman in 1989. The first is that the right to retain one's job is sacrosanct and cannot be interfered with by affirmative action under any circumstances. The program is best used in recruiting new workers. Thus, one may recruit an equally qualified Afro-American teacher over a Euro-American one on affirmative action grounds but not fire a Euro-American teacher instead of an Afro-American one for this reason.

Second, while affirmative action is still needed in promotion decisions, ethnic or gender considerations can come into play only where candidates are otherwise equally qualified. Finally, quotas of any kind are prohibited.

Another important consideration concerns the nature of jobs. It might be helpful, for example, to distinguish between knowledge-intensive and network-intensive jobs. A network-intensive job is one for which employers depend heavily on informal contacts when filling vacancies; it also requires a great deal of network negotiating skill for its performance. A knowledge-intensive job is one where purely technical or cognitive qualifications dominate the recruitment and performance processes. Now, barring sinecures in city halls and family firms around the country, nearly all jobs that are network-

intensive also require a minimum level of skills. But many jobs are almost wholly knowledge-intensive. I propose that affirmative action programs exclude such jobs and focus on network-intensive jobs—precisely those that can never be attained through schooling alone. These jobs, incidentally, are to be found at all levels of the occupational hierarchy.

Costs and responsibilities must also be borne by beneficiaries of affirmative action. One danger is that affirmative action may reduce the incentive for beneficiaries to perform at their very best. This troublesome possibility is suggested, for example, by the tendency for Afro-American students to perform below the level predicted by their test scores. I do not know whether the same problem exists at the workplace. One way of addressing or preventing an underachievement problem is for teachers and supervisors to evaluate with scrupulous honesty. Colleges should return to blind grading, and rules should be enacted that forbid all students from revealing their ethnic identities in their examination answers and papers.

The greatest risk of affirmative action is that it might become an institutionalized entitlement program. I strongly suspect that many otherwise sympathetic persons oppose it for precisely this reason. It is not an unreasonable apprehension, given the chronic propensity of government programs to become permanent. I will return to this in my final suggestion.

A related, and equally disturbing, danger is that some Afro-American leaders may conspire with segregationist Euro-Americans to stand affirmative action on its head. As this article has made clear, the main justification for affirmative action is that it compensates for the liability of isolation of Afro-



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Americans. It is both a medium-term substitution for, and a jump-start promotion of, the long-term solution of full ethnic integration. As integration is achieved, the need for affirmative action should be lessened. In this way, the program becomes self-canceling.

Two developments, however, hint at a possible subversion of this integrative process. One is the Afro-American identity movement, with its explicit rejection of integration and its celebration of ethnic separatism, as in the tendency of minority students to segregate themselves on the nation's campuses and the increasing propensity for voluntarily segregated neighborhoods among the Afro-American middle class.

The greatest risk of affirmative action is that it might become an institutionalized entitlement program.

The other development is best exemplified by the Atlanta model of ethnic relations. This city, which prides itself on being "too busy to hate," has fully embraced affirmative action, creating an environment with which the elites of both groups seem very comfortable. The only problem is that Atlanta remains extremely segregated. It seems as if a quid pro quo has emerged between the two dominant ethnic groups in which permanent affirmative action is accepted by the Euro-American elite as the price to be paid for the permanent segregation of the two groups—an adaptation of the old southern racist principle: separate, but now truly equal, at least among the elites. Were this indeed the case—and it is merely one inter-

Most readers and viewers of the nation's news media know from poll reports that the overwhelming majority of Americans regard affirmative action as unfair. At the same time, overwhelming support can be shown to exist for the affirmative action programs that people have experienced in person. How is this possible? The explanation lies in the profound difference between Americans' responses to survey questions about preferences in the abstract and their response to the programs they know.

In 1990 respondents to surveys by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago were asked "What do you think the chances are these days that a white person won't get a job or promo-

tion while an equally or less qualified Afro-American person gets one instead. Is this very likely, somewhat likely, or not very likely to happen these days?" The question was followed with probes into the reasons why the respondents held the views they did: was it "something that happened to you personally," "something that happened to a relative, family member, or close friend," something the respondent "saw occurring at work," or "heard about in the media," and so on.

In response to the speculative question, more than 70 percent of Euro-Americans asserted that other Euro-Americans were being hurt by affirmative action. But when the same group was asked, not to speculate about other Euro-Americans, but to reflect on their own experience with the program, only 7 percent claimed to have been influenced by affirmative action. Fewer than one in four had heard about or witnessed anything negative concerning affirmative action at their workplace.

When a NORC poll four years later asked respondents what they themselves thought about preferences in general, again the overwhelming majority of Euro-Americans were opposed. Indeed, half of all Afro-American men opposed hypothetical preferences—a reaction that, alone, should raise questions about just what respondents imagined they were responding to.

The contrast is remarkable. When Americans speculate in the abstract about the ethics of preferential scenarios, they oppose affirmative action. When they think about the real, concrete affirmative action programs they know about and experience at their workplace, they support it. A Harris

WHAT EVERYBODY HATES IN THEORY
BUT LIKES IN PRACTICE

pretation of what is happening in Atlanta—it would be a disastrous contradiction not only of the ends of affirmative action but of its main justification, at least as I have argued it.

One way of preventing or aborting such an outcome is to place some time limit on affirmative action. The program has already achieved a great deal although Afro-Americans remain badly unconnected and in need of help in overcoming their isolation. I have proposed elsewhere that affirmative action be gradually phased out over 15 years, at which time it would be converted to a class-based program. During this period every effort should be made to break down all remaining barriers to integration, including Afro-American resistance to integrated neighborhoods, intermarriage, and trans-ethnic adoptions.

We could begin immediately to reduce the social cost of the program by removing all categories of disadvantaged persons except Afro-Americans, Puerto Ricans, second-generation Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Euro-

American women. In another five years or so we should remove all upper-middle-class persons, say those from families with incomes greater than \$75,000. Ten years from now only working- and lower-class disadvantaged persons should be eligible, and Euro-American underprivileged persons could be phased in. In 15 years all ethnic criteria should be dropped; the resulting class-based program should last as long as poverty and underprivileged classes exist. As we ease out of the existing program and shift toward one based on socioeconomic disabilities, it becomes imperative that we reinforce and vigorously enforce laws against discrimination.

Placing a time limit on affirmative action would in all likelihood blunt the orchestrated politics of controversy that now bedevils it (see box below). And thinking about phasing it into a class-based entitlement program may at long last bring Americans around to a consideration of the growing inequality that threatens the harmony of our democracy far more than the alarmist cry of “racial division.” ■

Poll in June 1995 confirmed that support. Eighty percent of Americans polled thought that their employers were doing just about the right amount, or not enough, for women and minorities.

When Americans are asked what they think about affirmative action in the abstract, they merely relay what they have read or heard in the media. The 1994 NORC poll specifically asked respondents where they had received their negative views about the program and found that the single most important source of information was the media, mentioned by 42 percent of Euro-Americans. The result has been a self-confirming media distortion of Americans' views on the subject. The media, having declared the subject controversial and divisive, then conduct polls asking respondents if the program is controversial and divisive. Respondents tell the media pollsters what they want to hear, based on what they had recently heard or read in the media. The media then report these results as further proof that the program is highly divisive.

Even more disturbing has been the media's failure to report that the overwhelming majority of American workers and managers strongly supports the affirmative action programs at their workplace. The media are by no means a disinterested player in this matter. Affirmative action programs at the nation's media organizations have been greatly resented by many established journalists—the very people who make critical decisions about what

to highlight or neglect in news reports. The important 1995 Harris poll, for example, received almost no notice from the media, a point brought to my attention by Harris Poll CEO Humphry Taylor in a personal communication. “This Harris survey,” he wrote, “shows that the media have greatly overplayed the myth of the Euro-American male backlash and failed to report that the overwhelming majority of workers feel they have been treated fairly in the workplace. This is yet another case of a small, vocal minority being perceived as a majority.”

Political opponents of affirmative action, being fully aware of the discrepancy between opposition to preferences posed in the abstract and support of actual affirmative action programs, exploit that discrepancy by carefully avoiding any wording that mentions affirmative action in their own campaigns against the program. Indeed, in the campaign to repeal affirmative action in California, the petition against the program went to great and successful lengths to avoid any reference to the term “affirmative action” in the wording that finally appeared on the ballot. There is now reason to believe that a significant minority of those who voted for the petition did so thinking that they were voting on behalf of affirmative action and that this group was large enough to have defeated the petition had they voted for what they thought they were voting for. California's Proposition 209 may well have been a subversion of the democratic process. ■

When Americans are asked what they think about affirmative action in the abstract, they merely relay what they have read or heard in the media.

This material is drawn from Orlando Patterson, The Ordeal of Integration (Counterpoint/Civitas, 1997).

THE BLACK

WHY IT PERSISTS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE

BY CHRISTOPHER JENCKS
AND MEREDITH PHILLIPS

Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips, both of the Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, are the authors of the forthcoming The Black-White Score Gap, to be published by Brookings later this year.

African Americans score lower than European Americans on vocabulary, reading, and math tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence. The gap appears before children enter kindergarten and it persists into adulthood. It has narrowed since 1970, but the typical American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on almost every standardized test. This statistic does not imply, of course, that all blacks score below all whites. There is a lot of overlap between the two groups. Nonetheless, the test score gap is large enough to have significant social and economic consequences.

Closing the black-white test score gap would probably do more to promote racial equality in the United States than any other strategy now under serious discussion. Judging by the currently available statistical evidence, eliminating the test score gap would sharply increase black college graduation rates, making them nearly equal to white rates. Such a change would also allow selective colleges to phase out racial preferences in admission, which have long been a flashpoint for racial conflict. Eliminating the test score gap would also reduce racial disparities in men's earnings and would

probably eliminate the racial disparities in women's earnings.

Narrowing the test score gap would require continuous effort by both blacks and whites, and it would probably take more than one generation. But we think it can be done. This conviction rests on three facts. First, black-white differences in academic achievement have narrowed since 1970. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data on 17-year-olds show that the reading gap narrowed more than two-fifths between 1971 and 1994. The math gap has also narrowed, though not as much. Five major

TEST SCORE

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ORE GAP

national surveys of high school seniors conducted since 1965 show the same trend. So do surveys of younger students. The gap narrowed because black children's scores rose, not because white children's scores fell.

Second, even IQ scores clearly respond to changes in the environment. IQ scores, for example, have risen dramatically throughout the world since the 1930s. In America, 82 percent of those who took the Stanford-Binet test in 1978 scored above the 1932 average for individuals of the same age. The average black did about as well on the Stanford-Binet test in 1978 as the average white did in 1932.

Third, when black or mixed-race children are raised in white rather than black homes, their pre-adolescent test scores rise dramatically. These adoptees' scores seem to fall in adolescence, but this could easily be because their social and cultural environment comes to resemble that of other black teenagers.

EXPLAINING THE GAP

Traditional explanations for the black-white test score gap have not stood up well to the test of time. During the 1960s, most liberals blamed the gap on some combination of black poverty, racial segregation, and inadequate funding of black schools. Since then, the number of affluent black families has grown dramatically, but their children's test scores still lag far behind those of white children from equally affluent families. School desegregation may have played some role in reducing the black-white test score gap in the South, but school desegregation also seems to have costs for blacks, and when we compare initially similar students in today's schools, those who attend desegregated schools learn only slightly more than those in segregated schools.

Recent evidence suggests that disparities in school resources do affect achievement, but resource disparities between black and white children have shrunk steadily over time. The average black child now attends school in a district that spends as much per pupil as the average white child's district. Black children's schools also have about the same number of teachers per pupil as white schools. Predominantly white schools seem to attract more skilled teachers than black schools, but while black students who attend predominantly white schools probably benefit from having better teachers, this advantage seems to be offset by the social costs of being in an overwhelmingly white environment. In any event, schools cannot be the main reason for the black-white test score gap, because it appears before children enter school and persists even when black and white children attend the same schools. If schools play an important role in perpetuating the gap, either desegregated schools must be treating black and white children very differently or else black and white children must react very differently to the same treatment.

The three most common "conservative" explanations for the black-white gap—genes, the culture of poverty, and single motherhood—are also hard to reconcile with the available evidence. There is no direct genetic evidence for or against the

theory that the black-white gap is innate, because we have not yet identified the genes that affect skills like reading, math, and abstract reasoning. Studies of mixed-race children and black children adopted by white parents suggest, however, that racial differences in test performance are largely if not entirely environmental in origin.

Cultural differences associated with chronic poverty may account for some of the black-white test score gap, but they cannot be the main explanation, since the gap persists among affluent children. And while children raised by single mothers score lower on most standardized tests than children raised by married couples, this difference almost disappears once we take account of the fact that women who become single mothers come from less advantaged families, have lower test scores, and complete less schooling than women with husbands.

NEW DIRECTIONS

We suspect that successful new explanations for the test score gap will differ from their predecessors in several ways.

First, instead of emphasizing the kinds of racial differences that economists and sociologists usually study (parents' economic resources, parents' position in the occupational hierarchy, parents' exposure to formal education, and parents' living arrangements), successful theories will take more account of the factors that psychologists have traditionally emphasized (the way family members interact with one another and with the outside world, for example). A good explanation of why white five-year-olds have bigger vocabularies than black five-year-olds is likely to focus on how much the parents talk to their children, how they deal with their children's questions, and how they react when their children either learn or fail to learn something, not on how much money the parents have.

Second, instead of looking mainly for resource differences between predominantly black and predominantly white schools, successful theories will probably have to look more carefully at the way black and white children respond to the same classroom experiences, such as being in a smaller classroom, having a more competent teacher, having a teacher of their own race, or having a teacher with high expectations for those who perform below the norm for their age group.

Successful theories will therefore have to pay more attention to psychological and cultural influences, which are much harder to measure than income, education, and living arrangements. Collecting accurate data on black and white parents' habits, values, behavior, and ideas is not easy, and it would take time. It might well require an investment of time and effort comparable to the effort that went into developing cognitive tests during the first half of the 20th century. But without such work, we are in constant danger of seeing black-white differences as an inevitable byproduct of people's genes or of "cultural" factors that nobody can change.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our argument that reducing the black-white test score gap would do more to move America toward racial equality than any politically plausible alternative rests on two problematic premises: that policies aimed at reducing the test score gap are in fact politically feasible and that such policies can in fact reduce the gap.

Public support for almost any policy depends partly on whether the beneficiaries are perceived as deserving or undeserving. One obvious advantage of programs directed at children is that hardly anyone blames first graders' ignorance on their lack of motivation. First graders of every race seem eager to please. Both black and white adults often think that older black children lack academic motivation, but most adults still blame this on the children's parents or schools, not on the children themselves. That was why Lyndon Johnson emphasized helping children in his original war on poverty.

Policies that reduce the black-white gap will not, of course, be politically popular if they improve black children's test scores at white children's expense. Both school desegregation and eliminating academically selective classes at desegregated schools have aroused strong white resistance because of the perceived cost to white children. But these policies would not do blacks much good even if whites *were* willing to adopt them. The most promising school-related strategies for reducing the black-white test score gap seem to involve changes like reducing class size, setting minimum standards of academic competency for teachers, and raising teachers' expectations for low-performing students. All these changes would benefit both blacks and whites, but all appear to be especially beneficial for blacks.

An experiment carried out by the state of Tennessee during 1985–89 found, for example, that cutting class size in the early grades raised both black and white children's test scores and that these gains were sustained even after children moved on to larger classes. The experiment also found that gains were much larger for blacks than for whites. Historical evidence also seems to support the hypothesis that the black-white test score gap falls when class size falls. When low birth rates reduced school enrollment in the 1970s, the teacher-pupil ratio rose and classes shrank. Independent analyses by Ronald Ferguson and David Grissmer suggest that this change in class size was followed by a marked decline in the black-white test score gap.

Although measuring teachers' competence is harder than counting the number of children in a classroom, teachers' test scores show a stronger association with how much students learn than any other widely used measure. Teacher competency exams are thus likely to boost children's performance. Since the teachers who fail such tests are concentrated in black schools, such exams would probably prove especially beneficial to black students, although this benefit may be partially offset by the fact that the teachers who fail such tests are also disproportionately black.

Ferguson's review of the literature on teachers' expectations concludes that teachers do have lower expectations for blacks than for whites, but that this is largely because blacks enter

school with weaker cognitive skills than whites and learn a bit less after entering. But Ferguson also finds some evidence that low teacher expectations have a more negative effect on black children than on their white classmates.

Research also suggests that black-white differences in parenting practices contribute to the test score gap. Improving parenting skills may therefore be as important as improving schools. The puzzle is how to proceed. Like teachers, parents are usually suspicious of unsolicited advice about how to deal with their children. But once parents become convinced that a particular practice really helps their children, many adopt it. As a practical political matter, whites cannot tell black parents to change their parenting practices without provoking charges of ethnocentrism, racism, and much else. But blacks are hardly the only parents who need help. We should be promoting better parenting practices for all parents in every way we can, including television, which reaches both blacks and whites.

Finally, conservatives who want to improve academic achievement should stop emphasizing the relationship between heredity and achievement and play up the importance of another conservative virtue—namely, hard work. Americans seem to be unusually likely to attribute academic failure to low ability rather than inadequate effort. When Harold Stevenson and James Stigler asked American, Japanese, and Taiwanese parents and teachers why some children did better than others in school, the Americans were more likely to emphasize ability whereas the Japanese and Taiwanese were more likely to emphasize effort. This difference does not seem to reflect a difference in fundamental beliefs about causation. Children all over the world recognize that both ability and effort affect achievement, and the same is probably true for their parents as well. But attributing failure to inadequate effort implies that if you work harder, you will learn more. Attributing it to ability serves as an excuse for doing nothing.

Americans' emphasis on innate ability is likely to have especially negative consequences for African Americans, whose anxiety about racial stereotypes and intellectual competence can even depress their performance on standardized tests. Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson, for example, have shown that black Stanford undergraduates, unlike their white classmates, do measurably worse on tests when they are asked to record their race before taking the test or told that the test measures intellectual ability.

TIME FOR RENEWED ATTENTION

Psychologists, sociologists, and educational researchers have devoted far less attention to the black-white test score gap over the past quarter-century than they should have. Cowed by the hostile reaction to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report on the status of the black family and to Arthur Jensen's 1969 article arguing that racial differences in test performance were likely to be partly innate, most social scientists have chosen safer topics and hoped the problem would go away. We can do better. ■

UNEQUAL OP

BY LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND

W. E. B. Du Bois was right about the problem of the 21st century. The color line divides us still. In recent years, the most visible evidence of this in the public policy arena has been the persistent attack on affirmative action in higher education and employment. From the perspective of many Americans who believe that the vestiges of discrimination have disappeared, affirmative action now provides an unfair advantage to minorities. From the perspective of others who daily experience the consequences of ongoing discrimination, affirmative action is needed to protect opportunities likely to evaporate if an affirmative obligation to act fairly does not exist. And for Americans of all backgrounds, the allocation of opportunity in a society that is becoming ever more dependent on knowledge and education is a source of great anxiety and concern.

At the center of these debates are interpretations of the gaps in educational achievement between white and non-Asian minority students as measured by standardized test scores. The presumption that guides much of the conversation is that equal opportunity now exists; therefore, continued low levels of achievement on the part of minority students must be a function of genes, culture, or a lack of effort and will (see, for example, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve* and Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom's *America in Black and White*).

The assumptions that undergird this debate miss an important reality: educational outcomes for minority children are much more a function of their unequal access to key educational resources, including skilled teachers and quality curriculum, than they are a function of race. In fact, the U.S. educational system is one of the most unequal in the industrialized world, and students routinely receive dramatically different learning opportunities based on their social status. In contrast to European and Asian nations that fund schools centrally and equally, the wealthiest 10 percent of U.S. school districts spend nearly 10 times more than the poorest 10 percent, and spending ratios of 3 to 1 are common within states. Despite stark differences in funding, teacher quality, curriculum, and class sizes, the prevailing view is that if students do not achieve, it is their own fault. If we are ever to get beyond the problem of the color line, we must confront and address these inequalities.



Linda Darling-Hammond, of Columbia University Teachers College, is the author of *The Right to Learn* (Jossey Bass, 1997) and *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching* (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997). This article, drawn from data in both books, was completed while the author was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences. The author is grateful for support from the Spencer Foundation.

PORTUNITY

RACE AND EDUCATION



THE NATURE OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

Americans often forget that as late as the 1960s most African-American, Latino, and Native American students were educated in wholly segregated schools funded at rates many times lower than those serving whites and were excluded from many higher education institutions entirely. The end of legal segregation followed by efforts to equalize spending since 1970 has made a substantial difference for student achievement. On every major national test, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the gap in minority and white students' test scores narrowed substantially between 1970 and 1990, especially for elementary school students. On the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the scores of African-American students climbed 54

points between 1976 and 1994, while those of white students remained stable.

Even so, educational experiences for minority students have continued to be substantially separate and unequal. Two-thirds of minority students still attend schools that are predominantly minority, most of them located in central cities and funded well below those in neighboring suburban districts. Recent analyses of data prepared for school finance cases in Alabama, New Jersey, New

York, Louisiana, and Texas have found that on every tangible measure—from qualified teachers to curriculum offerings—schools serving greater numbers of students of color had significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly white students. As William L. Taylor and Dianne Piche noted in a 1991 report to Congress:

Inequitable systems of school finance inflict disproportionate harm on minority and economically disadvantaged students. On an inter-state basis, such students are concentrated in states, primarily in the South, that have the lowest capacities to finance public education. On an intra-state basis, many of the states with the widest disparities in educational expenditures are large industrial states. In these states, many minorities and economically disadvantaged students are located in property-poor

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urban districts which fare the worst in educational expenditures...(or) in rural districts which suffer from fiscal inequity.

Jonathan Kozol's 1991 *Savage Inequalities* described the striking differences between public schools serving students of color in urban settings and their suburban counterparts, which typically spend twice as much per student for populations with many fewer special needs. Contrast MacKenzie High School in Detroit, where word processing courses are taught without word processors because the school cannot afford them, or East St. Louis Senior High School, whose biology lab has no laboratory tables or usable dissecting kits, with nearby suburban schools where children enjoy a computer hookup to Dow Jones to study stock transactions and science laboratories that rival those in some industries. Or contrast Paterson, New Jersey, which could not afford the qualified teachers needed to offer foreign language courses to most high school students, with Princeton, where foreign languages begin in elementary school.

Even *within* urban school districts, schools with high concentrations of low-income and minority students receive fewer instructional resources than others. And tracking systems exacerbate these inequalities by segregating many low-income and minority students within schools. In combination, these policies leave minority students with fewer and lower-quality books, curriculum materials, laboratories, and computers; significantly larger class sizes; less qualified and experienced teachers; and less access to high-quality curriculum. Many schools serving low-income and minority students do not even offer the math and science courses needed for college, and they provide lower-quality teaching in the classes they do offer. It all adds up.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Since the 1966 Coleman report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, another debate has waged as to whether money makes a difference to educational outcomes. It is certainly possible to spend money ineffectively; however, studies that have developed more sophisticated measures of schooling show how money, properly spent, makes a difference. Over the past 30 years, a large body of research has shown that four factors consistently influence student achievement: all else equal, students perform better if they are educated in smaller schools where they are well known (300 to 500 students is optimal), have smaller class sizes (especially at the elementary level), receive a challenging curriculum, and have more highly qualified teachers.

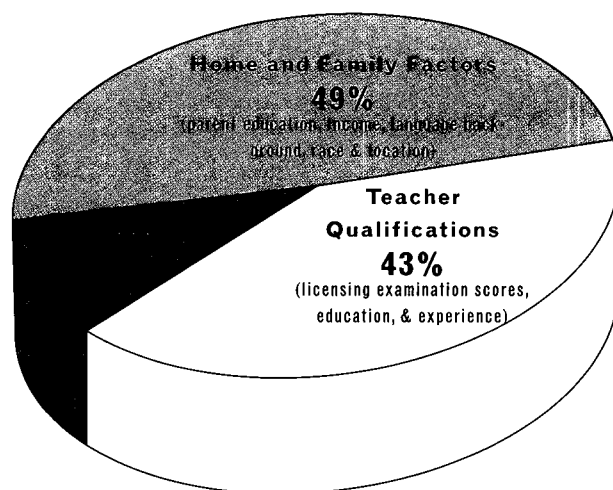
Minority students are much less likely than white children to have any of these resources. In predominantly minority schools, which most students of color attend, schools are large (on average, more than twice as large as predominantly white schools and reaching 3,000 students

or more in most cities); on average, class sizes are 15 percent larger overall (80 percent larger for non-special education classes); curriculum offerings and materials are lower in quality; and teachers are much less qualified in terms of levels of education, certification, and training in the fields they teach. And in integrated schools, as UCLA professor Jeannie Oakes described in the 1980s and Harvard professor Gary Orfield's research has recently confirmed, most minority students are segregated in lower-track classes with larger class sizes, less qualified teachers, and lower-quality curriculum.

Research shows that teachers' preparation makes a tremendous difference to children's learning. In an analysis of 900 Texas school districts, Harvard economist Ronald Ferguson found that teachers' expertise—as measured by scores on a licensing examination, master's degrees, and experience—was the single most important determinant of student achievement, accounting for roughly 40 percent of the measured variance in students' reading and math achievement gains in grades 1–12. After controlling for socioeconomic status, the large disparities in achievement between black and white students were almost entirely due to differences in the qualifications of their teachers. In combination, differences in teacher expertise and class sizes accounted for as much of the measured variance in achievement as did student and family background (figure 1).

Figure 1. Influence of Teacher Qualifications on Student Achievement

Proportion of Explained Variance in Math Test Score Gains (from Grades 3 to 5) Due To:



Developed from data presented in Ronald F. Ferguson, "Paying for Public Education: New Evidence on How and Why Money Matters," *Harvard Journal of Legislation*, vol. 28 (Summer 1991).

Over the past 30 years, a large body of research has shown that four factors consistently influence student achievement: all else equal, students perform better if they are educated in smaller schools where they are well known, have smaller class sizes (especially at the elementary level), receive a challenging curriculum, and have more highly qualified teachers.

Ferguson and Duke economist Helen Ladd repeated this analysis in Alabama and again found sizable influences of teacher qualifications and smaller class sizes on achievement gains in math and reading. They found that more of the difference between the high- and low-scoring districts was explained by teacher qualifications and class sizes than by poverty, race, and parent education.

Meanwhile, a Tennessee study found that elementary school students who are assigned to ineffective teachers for three years in a row score nearly 50 percentile points lower on achievement tests than those assigned to highly effective teachers over the same period. Strikingly, minority students are about half as likely to be assigned to the

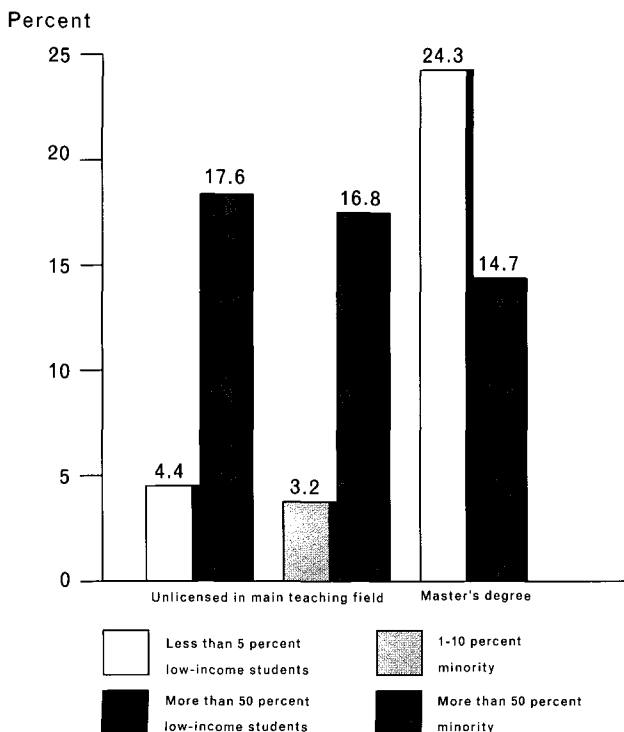
most effective teachers and twice as likely to be assigned to the least effective.

Minority students are put at greatest risk by the American tradition of allowing enormous variation in the qualifications of teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future found that new teachers hired without meeting certification standards (25 percent of all new teachers) are usually assigned to teach the most disadvantaged students in low-income and high-minority schools, while the most highly educated new teachers are hired largely by wealthier schools (figure 2). Students in poor or predominantly minority schools are much less likely to have teachers who are fully qualified or hold higher-level degrees. In schools with the highest minority enrollments, for example, students have less than a 50 percent chance of getting a math or science teacher with a license and a degree in the field. In 1994, fully one-third of teachers in high-poverty schools taught without a minor in their main field and nearly 70 percent taught without a minor in their secondary teaching field.

Studies of underprepared teachers consistently find that they are less effective with students and that they have difficulty with curriculum development, classroom management, student motivation, and teaching strategies. With little knowledge about how children grow, learn, and develop, or about what to do to support their learning, these teachers are less likely to understand students' learning styles and differences, to anticipate students' knowledge and potential difficulties, or to plan and redirect instruction to meet students' needs. Nor are they likely to see it as their job to do so, often blaming the students if their teaching is not successful.

Teacher expertise and curriculum quality are interrelated, because a challenging curriculum requires an expert teacher. Research has found that both students and teachers are tracked: that is, the most expert teachers teach the most demanding courses to the most advantaged students, while lower-track students assigned to less able teachers receive lower-quality teaching and less demanding material. Assignment to tracks is also related to race: even when grades and test scores are comparable, black students are more likely to be assigned to lower-track, nonacademic classes.

Figure 2. Qualifications of Newly Hired Teachers, by School Type, 1994



Source: Schools and Staffing Surveys, 1993-94. Tabulations conducted by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Published in *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching* (New York: National Commission on Teaching).

WHEN OPPORTUNITY IS MORE EQUAL

What happens when students of color do get access to more equal opportunities? Studies find that curriculum quality and teacher skill make more difference to educational outcomes than the initial test scores or racial backgrounds of students. Analyses of national data from both the High School and Beyond Surveys and the National Educational Longitudinal Surveys have demonstrated that, while there are dramatic differences among students of various racial and ethnic groups in course-taking in such areas as math, science, and foreign language, for students with similar course-taking records, achievement test score differences by race or ethnicity narrow substantially.

Robert Dreeben and colleagues at the University of Chicago conducted a long line of studies documenting both the relationship between educational opportunities and student performance and minority students' access to those opportunities. In a comparative study of 300 Chicago first graders, for example, Dreeben found that African-American and white students who had comparable instruction achieved comparable levels of reading skill. But he also found that the quality of instruction given African-American students was, on average, much lower than that given white students, thus creating a racial gap in aggregate achievement at the end of first grade. In fact, the highest-ability group in Dreeben's sample was in a school in a low-income African-American neighborhood. These children, though, learned less during first grade than their white counterparts because their teacher was unable to provide the challenging instruction they deserved.

When schools have radically different teaching forces, the effects can be profound. For example, when Eleanor Armour-Thomas and colleagues compared a group of exceptionally effective elementary schools with a group of low-achieving schools with similar demographic characteristics in New York City, roughly 90 percent of the variance in student reading and mathematics scores at grades 3, 6, and 8 was a function of differences in teacher qualifications. The schools with highly qualified teachers serving large numbers of minority and low-income students performed as well as much more advantaged schools.

Most studies have estimated effects statistically. However, an experiment that randomly assigned seventh grade "at-risk" students to remedial, average, and honors mathematics classes found that the at-risk students who took the honors class offering a pre-algebra curriculum ultimately outperformed all other students of similar backgrounds. Another study compared African-American high school youth randomly placed in public housing in the Chicago suburbs with city-placed peers of equivalent income and initial academic attainment and found that the suburban students, who attended largely white and better-funded schools, were substantially more likely to take challenging courses, perform well academically, graduate on time, attend college, and find good jobs.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

This state of affairs is not inevitable. Last year the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future issued a blueprint for a comprehensive set of policies to ensure a "caring, competent, and qualified teacher for every child," as well as schools organized to support student success. Twelve states are now working directly with the commission on this agenda, and others are set to join this year. Several pending bills to overhaul the federal Higher Education Act would ensure that highly qualified teachers are recruited and prepared for students in all schools. Federal policymakers can develop incentives, as they have in medicine, to guarantee well-prepared teachers in shortage fields and high-need locations. States can equalize education spending, enforce higher teaching standards, and reduce teacher shortages, as Connecticut, Kentucky, Minnesota, and North Carolina have already done. School districts can reallocate resources from administrative superstructures and special add-on programs to support better-educated teachers who offer a challenging curriculum in smaller schools and classes, as restructured schools as far apart as New York and San Diego have done. These schools, in communities where children are normally written off to lives of poverty, welfare dependency, or incarceration, already produce much higher levels of achievement for students of color, sending more than 90 percent of their students to college. Focusing on what matters most can make a real difference in what children have the opportunity to learn. This, in turn, makes a difference in what communities can accomplish.

AN ENTITLEMENT TO GOOD TEACHING

The common presumption about educational inequality—that it resides primarily in those students who come to school with inadequate capacities to benefit from what the school has to offer—continues to hold wide currency because the extent of inequality in opportunities to learn is largely unknown. We do not currently operate schools on the presumption that students might be entitled to decent teaching and schooling as a matter of course. In fact, some state and local defendants have countered school finance and desegregation cases with assertions that such remedies are not required unless it can be proven that they will produce equal outcomes. Such arguments against equalizing opportunities to learn have made good on Du Bois's prediction that the problem of the 20th century would be the problem of the color line.

But education resources do make a difference, particularly when funds are used to purchase well-qualified teachers and high-quality curriculum and to create personalized learning communities in which children are well known. In all of the current *sturm und drang* about affirmative action, "special treatment," and the other high-volatility buzzwords for race and class politics in this nation, I would offer a simple starting point for the next century's efforts: no special programs, just equal educational opportunity. ■

RACE RELATIONS & CENTRAL CITY SCHOOLS

Some say U. S. race relations are improving; others say not. Some say that affirmative action has fostered racial progress; others say not. But almost all Americans, liberal or conservative, agree that in the long run racial equality can be fully achieved only by eliminating disparities in the average educational performances of blacks and whites. Most Americans, we submit, would go so far as to say that if the next generation of blacks and whites acquire similar academic skills, the remaining barriers to racial equality could well slip away of their own accord.

But despite the broad consensus for education's central importance, the United States tolerates the isolation of half of its African-American children in public school within an unsafe and severely underperforming system. Any serious attempt to eliminate racial inequities must correct this glaring blot on the nation's racial report card.



IT'S TIME FOR AN
EXPERIMENT
WITH VOUCHERS

BY PAUL E. PETERSON AND JAY P. GREENE

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CENTRAL-CITY SCHOOLS

Half of all African Americans, but only 20 percent of whites, in public school attend central-city schools. In the largest U.S. cities, the racial differences between central-city and suburban schools are even more dramatic. In Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, and Washington, more than 85 percent of public school students are of minority background.

Unfortunately, it is in these big cities that public schools fail their students most miserably and the costs of failure are most severe. According to a national survey carried out in 1996, only 46 percent of urban students read at a “basic” level, as compared with 63 percent of students in nonurban areas. Among high-poverty schools, the differences are even greater. Only 23 percent of students at urban high-poverty schools read at the basic level as compared with 46 percent in nonurban high-poverty areas. Similar performances for urban schools were reported in math and science. As columnist William Raspberry recently put it in the *Washington Post*, “Poor children desperately need better education. Yet the schools they attend—particularly in America’s overwhelmingly black and brown inner cities—may be the least successful of all public schools.”

In most big cities, average test scores fall as students advance through the public schools. For example, early last year a *New York Times* article matched New York City students against statewide averages, controlling for students’ racial and income

status. It found that they scored 3 percentile points behind the statewide average in third grade, 6 percentile points behind in sixth grade, and as much as 15 points behind in high school.

According to Department of Education statistics, the share of all students who go to private schools is much higher in big cities (15.8 percent) than in either suburban (11.7 percent) or rural areas (5.4 percent). Lacking the resources to follow suit, low-income central-city families often find themselves forced to accept the school to which their child is assigned, leaving many dissatisfied. A *New York Times* article reported last December, for example, that 93 percent of blacks in Denver agreed that “some children in the Denver public school system are receiving a sub-standard education.”

As evidence of urban school failure piles up, Urban League President Hugh Price has put big-city schools on notice: “If urban schools...continue to fail in the face of all we know about how to improve them, then [parents] will be obliged to shop elsewhere for quality education. We Urban Leaguers believe passionately in public education. But make no mistake. We love our children even more.”

Fed up with central-city schools, many African Americans are beginning to throw their support behind school vouchers.

FLOCKING TO VOUCHERS

Fed up with central-city schools, many African Americans are beginning to throw their support behind school vouchers. When Stanford professor Terry Moe recently conducted a nationwide survey of 4,700 parents, he found that school choice commands the

Table 1. Characteristics of Major Big-City School Choice Programs for Low-Income Families									
Program	Sponsor	Religious schools included	Grades	First school year	Initial enrollment	1996–97 enrollment	Number of schools	Maximum payment	Selection method
Milwaukee	State of Wisconsin	No	preK–12	1990–91	341	850 ^a	12	\$3,209 ^a	lottery
Indianapolis	ECCT [♦]	Yes	K–8	1991–92	746	1,014	70	\$800	first-come
Milwaukee	PAVE [*]	Yes	K–12	1992–93	2,089	4,465	97	\$1,000/elem. \$1,500/high	first-come
Cleveland	State of Ohio	Yes	K–3	1996–97	1,996	1,996	55	\$2,500	lottery
New York City	SCSF [▪]	Yes	1–5	1997–98	1,200	1,200 ^b	NA	\$1,400	lottery
^a 1994–95 ^b 1997–98									
[♦] Educational Choice Charitable Trust [*] Partners Advancing Values in Education [▪] School Choice Scholarships Foundation									

Table 2. Gains in Parental Satisfaction When Children Move to Choice Schools

Program	Percentage gain in parental satisfaction with:					
	Teacher	Instruction	Discipline	Amount learned	Safety	Parental involvement
Milwaukee ^a	1	16	16	16	NA	17
Indianapolis ^b	25	39	40	32	NA	NA
Cleveland ^c	31 ^d	34 ^e	22	NA	33	35

NA. Not available.

^a John F. Witte et al., "Fourth-Year Report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," Robert LaFollette Institute of Public Affairs, University of Wisconsin-Madison, December 1994, table A6. Average gain for the first four years among parents who were very satisfied with the choice school.

^b David J. Weinschrott and Sally B. Kilgore, "Educational Choice Charitable Trust: An Experiment in School Choice," Hudson Brief Paper No. 189, Hudson Institute, Indianapolis, Indiana. Gain after two years among parents who were satisfied and very satisfied with the choice school.

^c Jay P. Greene, Paul E. Peterson, and William Howell, "Preliminary Report on Cleveland School Scholarship Program," Program in Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, 1997. Difference between parents of applicants winning a scholarship and applicants not selected who remained in public schools. Percent "very satisfied."

^d Question asked about satisfaction with "private attention to child."

^e Question asked about satisfaction with "academic quality."

greatest support in central cities: 79 percent of the inner-city poor favor a "voucher plan," compared with 59 percent of whites living in more advantaged communities. And 61 percent of the inner-city poor "strongly" favor vouchers, as against just 31 percent of the advantaged whites.

A national survey of black and white Americans last year by the Joint Center of Political and Economic Studies also found the greatest support for vouchers among African Americans: 57 percent, as compared with 47 percent of white respondents. Younger and poorer African Americans were the most supportive. Finally, a poll conducted last summer by Phi Delta Kappa, a professional education association, found that 72 percent of black respondents favored vouchers, compared with just 48 percent of the general population.

CHOICE SCHOOLS

Though few are prepared to defend central-city schools, some wonder whether giving inner-city children a chance to go to a private school will make much difference. Studies of five state or privately

funded voucher or scholarship programs that offer low-income inner-city students a choice of private schools, religious or secular, provide some answers to often-asked questions. Two of the five programs are in Milwaukee; the others, in Indianapolis, Cleveland, and New York City (table 1).

Most students in these programs come from disadvantaged families. In all cities except Indianapolis most are likely to be African American. Most come from one-parent families. Many receive welfare, Medicaid, food stamps, or other government assistance. Average test scores are well below national norms. However, a majority of students come from families in which at least one parent says he or she has had some college education, though these self-reports may be inflated.

SATISFACTION WITH CHOICE SCHOOLS

Participating families love their choice schools. A year into the Cleveland choice program, parent Pamela Ballard exclaimed, "HOPE Academy was my last hope. I took my third-grade child, who had been in several Cleveland schools and was labeled a 'problem child.' I now have a successful child. Where there were D's and C's, there are now A's and B's."

Ballard's enthusiasm represents the norm, not the exception. According to three different studies, choice schools are more popular than public schools (see table 2). The studies use slightly different methodologies and ask somewhat different questions, some about teachers and instruction, others about the amount learned, discipline, safety, and parental involvement. But the results do not depend much on the methodology or the question. Almost always, parents prefer choice to public schools, usually by large margins.

Nor do impartial observers disagree with parents' positive assessments. In Milwaukee, for example, a reporter for *Education Week* reached much the same conclusions that Milwaukee parents did: "Classes here are highly structured and yet free of regimentation; there is a sense of order, yet order itself is not the point. The activities are purposeful; the students enthusiastic participants." But it is one seventh grader who, in a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching interview, made the most convincing case for her new school: "As soon as I came here it was a big change. Here, teachers care about you.... [In public school] the teachers were too busy to help." Worst of all, she said, were the fights: "You really can't avoid it. They'll think you're scared."

Most revealing of all, school teachers are more likely than the average central-city resident to pick a private school for their own son or daughter. As Dennis Doyle noted in a 1995 report for the Center for Education Reform, 40 percent of the children of Cleveland public school teachers go to private school, as compared with 25 percent of all children. In Milwaukee the percentages are 33 as compared with 23, in Boston 45 as compared with 29.

TEST SCORES

Students also seem to learn more in choice schools. In Cleveland, for example, students in two schools (that enrolled about 25 percent of the former public school students) made significant gains in both math and reading. The Cleveland findings, however, may be contaminated by what is known as the selection effect. After all, families who are clever and motivated enough to get a scholarship are likely to have other attributes that spur their children's educational attainment. But higher-quality data are available from the choice experiment in Milwaukee, where the students applying for choice were assigned to a test or control group by means of a lottery.

Our examination of the Milwaukee data showed that a student's enrollment in the program had only modest effects during the first two years. But by years three and four, choice students began outstripping their peers in the control group. If such gains can be duplicated nationwide, they could reduce by between one-third and one-half the current difference between white and minority test score performance.

It should not be surprising that student performance does not improve considerably until the third and fourth years. Choice schools are not magic bullets. Education does not happen overnight; it takes time to adjust to a new teaching and learning environment. The disruption of switching schools and adjusting to new routines and expectations may hamper improvement in test scores in the first year or two in a choice school. Educational benefits accumulate and multiply with the passage of time.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND BALKANIZATION

Choice critics point out that the purpose of education is not merely to teach math and reading, but also to prepare citizens for a democratic society. According to critics such as former *New Republic* editor Michael Kelly, "Public money is shared money, and it is to be used for

the furtherance of shared values, in the interests of *e pluribus unum*. Charter schools and their like...take from the *pluribus* to destroy the *unum*."

It was, after all, not so long ago that choice privatization was a strategy favored by those seeking to avoid compliance with the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. But other courts went on to strike down these misguided attempts to perpetuate racial segregation, precluding such strategies in the future. The evidence from most private schools today is that privatization leads to less balkanization, not more.

Today's private school students are less racially isolated than their public school peers. According to 1992 Department of Education data, 37 percent of private school students are in classrooms whose share of minority students is close to the national average, compared with only 18 percent of public school students. Not only are private school students more likely to be in well-integrated classrooms, they are less likely



to be in extremely segregated ones (either more than 90 percent white or more than 90 percent minority). Forty-one percent of private school students are in highly segregated classrooms, as compared with 55 percent of their public school peers.

Private school students also report more positive relationships with students from other racial and ethnic groups. According to the same 1992 survey, they are significantly more likely to have cross-racial friendships than are students at public schools. And students, teachers, and administrators at private schools all report fewer racial problems.

Private school students are also more community-spirited. According to the 1992 survey, students at private schools are more likely than public school students to think that it is

Inner-city school choice could also reduce racial isolation within the central city.

important to help others and volunteer for community causes. They also are more likely to report that they in fact did volunteer in the past two years and to say their school expected them to do so.

THE CHURCH-STATE QUESTION

Federal constitutional questions may not pose as much of a stumbling block to school choice as it once seemed, despite some lower court decisions to the contrary. State-provided scholarships do not “establish a religion” as long as parents are free to use them to send their children to any school, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or secular. The Supreme Court so reasoned in 1983 (*Mueller v. Allen*) when it ruled constitutional a Minnesota tax deduction for educational expenses, whether for secular or for parochial schooling. And it reaffirmed that reasoning in *Agostini v. Felton* (1997), when it said that public school teachers could provide compensatory educational instruction in parochial schools. The Court conditioned its decision on policies that made instruction “available generally without regard to the sectarian-nonsectarian or public-nonpublic nature of the institution benefitted,” further justifying its decision on the grounds that no religion was aided except as the result of the “private choices of individuals.” Most school choice programs easily pass such a test.

COMPETITION CAN INVIGORATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

But how about those left behind? American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman has said that vouchers and scholarships for private schools take “money away from inner-city schools so a few selected children can get vouchers to attend private schools, while the majority of equally deserving kids, who remain in the public schools, are ignored.”

Yet there is little reason to expect the best and the brightest to flee the public schools to take advantage of inner-city choice programs. For one thing, most big-city school systems have their own special programs—magnet schools, gifted classes, and honors tracks—that siphon off the best students. Also, parents can be expected not to change their children’s school unless they have doubts about their progress. In New York City, only 26 percent of those applying for choice schools scored at grade level on

the reading test, far below the 55 percent of all elementary school students scoring at that level as reported by the city’s school system.

The creaming of inner-city public schools took place long before school choice arrived on the public agenda. In America’s biggest cities, the middle-class population has already left for suburbia or for private schools. Indeed, one attraction of inner-city school choice is the possibility that it could reduce racial isolation within the central city.

Speaking to a Pittsburgh conference on urban renewal last July, Milwaukee’s visionary mayor, John Norquist, argued that if school choice becomes a reality, “public schools will respond to private-sector competition with an aggressive effort to maintain their clientele, just as United and American Airlines did.” Empowered to choose among a variety of schools, young parents with children entering school will forgo the expensive move to the suburbs and pick instead a local school suited to their needs. Other families, offered better schools in the cities, will give up their suburban homes to live closer to their jobs. Businesses will open schools so their employees can bring their children with them on their daily commute. The central-city economy will pick up, property values will rise, racial integration will increase, and central-city test scores will rise.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY?

School choice is not a panacea that can resolve all of society’s race-related problems. It will not by itself eliminate all the differences in the educational performances of racial groups. Much of what we know, we learn not in school but from our families, friends, and myriad other life experiences. But schools are one of the most important sources available to the government for the amelioration of racial inequity.

Unfortunately, many have come to believe that for government to achieve that objective, it must directly operate the educational system it finances. But government often can better achieve its goals by mobilizing the energies of churches, nonprofits, and profit-making institutions. In most policy arenas—transportation, health services, scientific research, pollution control—that is the strategy government typically follows. When government-operated institutions, such as central-city schools, have fallen into a serious state of disrepair, it is even more crucial that government find alternative ways of achieving common objectives. As William Raspberry urgently recommends: “It’s time for some serious experimentation.” ■

AN AMERICAN

The Legacy of Slavery Lingers in Our Cities' Ghettos

The United States of America, “a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” began as a slave society. What can rightly be called the “original sin” of slavery has left an indelible imprint on our nation’s soul. A terrible price had to be paid, in a tragic, calamitous civil war, before this new democracy could be rid of that most undemocratic institution. But for black Americans the end of slavery was just the beginning of our quest for democratic equality; another century would pass before the nation came fully to embrace that goal. Even now millions of Americans recognizably of African descent languish in societal backwaters. What does this say about our civic culture as we enter a new century?

The eminent Negro man of letters W. E. B. Du Bois predicted in 1903 that the issue of the 20th century would be “the problem of the color line.” He has been proven right. At mid-century the astute Swedish observer of American affairs, Gunnar Myrdal, reiterated the point, declaring the race problem to be our great national dilemma and fretting about the threat it posed to the success of our democratic experiment. Du Bois must have relished the irony of having a statue named Liberty oversee the arrival in New York’s harbor of millions of foreigners, “tempest tossed” and “yearning to breathe free,” even as black Southern peasants—not alien, just profoundly alienated—were kept unfree at the social mar-



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TRAGEDY

BY GLENN C. LOURY

gins. And Myrdal observed a racist ideology that openly questioned the Negro's human worth survive our defeat of the Nazis and abate only when the Cold War rivalry made it intolerable that the "leader of the free world" should be seen to preside over a regime of racial subordination.

This sharp contrast between America's lofty ideals, on the one hand, and the seemingly permanent second-class status of the Negroes, on the other, put the onus on the nation's political elite to choose the nobility of their civic creed over the comfort of longstanding social arrangements. Ultimately they did so. Viewed in historic and cross-national perspective, the legal and political transformation of American race relations since World War II represents a remarkable achievement, powerfully confirming the virtue of our political institutions. Official segregation, which some southerners as late as 1960 were saying would live forever, is dead. The caste system of social domination enforced with open violence has been eradicated. Whereas two generations ago most Americans were indifferent or hostile to blacks' demands for equal citizenship rights, now the ideal of equal opportunity is upheld by our laws and universally embraced in our politics. A large and stable black middle class has emerged, and black participation in the economic, political, and cultural life of this country, at every level and in every venue, has expanded impressively. This is good news. In the final years of this traumatic, exhilarating century, it deserves to be celebrated.



WIKTOR SADOWSKI

TODAY'S RACE PROBLEM

Nevertheless, as anyone even vaguely aware of the social conditions in contemporary America knows, we still face a “problem of the color line.” The dream that race might some day become an insignificant category in our civic life now seems naively utopian. In cities across the country, and in rural areas of the Old South, the situation of the black underclass and, increasingly, of the black lower working classes is bad and getting worse. No well-informed person denies this, though there is debate over what can and should be done about it. Nor do serious people deny that the crime, drug addiction, family breakdown, unemployment, poor school performance, welfare dependency, and general decay in these communities constitute a blight on our society virtually unrivaled in scale and severity by anything to be found elsewhere in the industrial West.

What is sometimes denied, but what must be recognized is that this is, indeed, a race problem. The plight of the underclass is not rightly seen as another (albeit severe) instance of economic inequality, American style. These black ghetto dwellers are a people apart, susceptible to stereotyping, stigmatized for their cultural styles, isolated socially, experiencing an internalized sense of helplessness and despair, with limited access to communal networks of mutual assistance. Their purported criminality, sexual profligacy, and intellectual inadequacy are the frequent objects of public derision. In a word, they suffer a pariah status. It should not require enormous powers of perception to see how this degradation relates to the shameful history of black-white race relations in this country.

Moreover, there is a widening rift between blacks and whites who are not poor—a conflict of visions about the continuing importance of race in American life. Most blacks see race as still of fundamental importance; most whites (and also many Asians and Hispanics) think blacks are obsessed with race. This rift impedes the attain-

ment of commonly shared, enthusiastically expressed civic ideals that might unite us across racial lines in efforts to grapple with our problems. The notion of the “beloved community”—where blacks and whites transcend their differences and cooperate in universal brotherhood to foster racial integration—has never achieved broad appeal. As sociologist William Julius Wilson stressed 20 years ago in his misunderstood classic, *The Declining Significance of Race*, the

actors—reached its limit more than a decade ago. Deep improvement in the status of many blacks has taken place, even as the underclass has grown, and there seems to be no politically effective way of mobilizing a national assault on the remaining problems.

What is more, there has been profound demographic change in American society since the 1960s. During this period, nearly 20 million immigrants have arrived on our shores, mostly from

The self-limiting patterns of behavior among poor blacks are a product, not of some alien cultural imposition upon a pristine Euro-American canvas, but of social, economic, and political practices deeply rooted in American history.

locus of racial conflict in our society has moved from the economic to the social and political spheres.

Indeed, standing at the end of the 20th century, one can almost see Du Bois's “problem of the color line” shifting before one's eyes. An historic transformation on race-related issues in the United States is taking place. Arguments about black progress are but one part of the broader endeavor to recast our national understanding of racial matters—an undertaking of enormous importance. It has been a very long time since the civil rights movement constituted a force able to mold the nation's moral sensibilities. A struggle that succeeded brilliantly to win legal equality for blacks after a century of second-class citizenship has for the most part failed to win a national commitment toward eradicating the effects of this historical inheritance. The civil rights approach—petitioning the courts and the federal government for relief against the discriminatory treatment of private or state

non-European points of origin. Hispanics will soon be the nation's largest ethnic minority group. Asian-American college students and urban entrepreneurs are more numerous and more important in the country's economic and political life than ever before. This development is making obsolete the old black-white framework, though blacks must occupy a unique position in any discussion of the nation's ethnic history. But nowadays, as a political matter, to focus solely on the old tension between blacks and whites is to miss something of basic importance.

It is against this backdrop that statistical analyses of the status of African Americans are being conducted. Assessing how much or how little progress has taken place for blacks, and why, is one of the most fiercely contested empirical issues in the social sciences. For years, liberal advocates of blacks' interests tried to deny that meaningful change was occurring. That assessment has always had problems, in

my view. In any event, it is no longer tenable. Now the dominant voices on this subject come from right of center. They seem decidedly unfriendly to black aspirations. With great fanfare, these conservatives declare the historic battle against racial caste to have been won. They go on to say that, but for the behavioral dysfunction of the black poor and the misguided demands for affirmative action from a race-obsessed black middle class, our “problem of the

ground, cultural affinities, and communal influence are also of great significance. This is the grain of truth in the conservatives’ insistence that cultural differences lie at the root of racial inequality in America. But the deeper truth is that, for some three centuries now, the communal experience of the slaves and their descendants has been shaped by political, social, and economic institutions that, by any measure, must be seen as oppressive. When we look at

discuss and react to them as if we were talking about our own children, neighbors, and friends. This is an American tragedy, to which we should respond as we might to an epidemic of teen suicide, adolescent drunken driving, or HIV infection among homosexual males—that is, by embracing, not demonizing, the victims.

The problem with talk about black culture, black crime, and black illegitimacy, as explanatory categories in the hands of the morally obtuse, is that it becomes an exculpatory device—a way of avoiding a discussion of mutual obligation. It is a distressing fact about contemporary American politics that simply to make this point is to risk being dismissed as an apologist for the inexcusable behavior of the poor. The deeper moral failing lies with those who, declaring “we have done all we can,” would wash their hands of the poor.

It is morally and intellectually superficial in the extreme to begin and end one’s argument with the observation that the problems of the underclass are due to their high rates of criminal behavior and out-of-wedlock births, and not to white racism. But this is what political discourse assessing the status of blacks has come to. The highly ideological character of racial debate in America makes nuance and complexity almost impossible to sustain. For while it may be true that the most debilitating impediments to advancement among the underclass derive from patterns of behavior that are self-limiting, it is also true that our history has dealt poor blacks a very bad hand. Yes, there must be change in these behaviors if progress is to be made. But a commitment of support will also be required from the broader society to help these folks help themselves.

The conservatives deny this. They rationalize the nasty, brutish, and short lives of a sizable minority of the black population as reflecting blacks’ deficiencies, rather than revealing any flaw in “our way of life.” Nowhere is the ideological character of this stance more clearly revealed than in the conservatives’ celebration of immigrant success, over and against native black failure.



color line” could be put behind us. Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom, with their new book, *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*, offer a prime example of this mode of assessment. This line of argument should not be permitted to shape our national understanding of these matters. Permit me briefly to say why.

ROOTED IN HISTORY

A social scientist of any sophistication recognizes that societies are not amalgams of unrelated individuals creating themselves anew—out of whole cloth, as it were—in each generation. A complex web of social connections and a long train of historical influences interact to form the opportunities and shape the outlooks of individuals. Of course, individual effort is important, as is native talent and sheer luck, for determining how well or poorly a person does in life. But social back-

“underclass culture” in the American cities of today we are seeing a product of that oppressive history. It is morally obtuse and scientifically naive to say, in the face of the despair, violence, and self-destructive folly of these people, that “if they would get their acts together, like the poor Asian immigrants, then we would not have such a horrific problem in our cities.”

The only decent response in the face of the “pathological” behavior of American history’s losers is to conclude that, while we cannot change our ignoble past, we must not be indifferent to the contemporary suffering that is linked to that past. The self-limiting patterns of behavior among poor blacks—which some commentators are so quick to trot out—are a product, not of some alien cultural imposition upon a pristine Euro-American canvas, but, rather, of social, economic, and political practices deeply rooted in American history. We should not ignore the behavioral problems of the underclass, but we should

That nonwhite immigrants succeed is taken as a vindication of the system; that blacks fail is said to be due entirely to their own inadequacies. This is obscenely ahistorical. Frankly, I remain optimistic about the prospect that black teenagers, given greater opportunity, might respond with better behavior. What makes me pessimistic about our future is the spectacle of politically influential American intellectuals grasping at these cultural arguments as reason to abandon or ignore their moral responsibilities to those who are least fortunate in our society.

COLOR IS NOT IRRELEVANT

The debate over affirmative action has also become quite ideological in tone. I have been a critic of affirmative action policies for more than 15 years. I was among the first to stress how the use of racial preferences sheltered blacks from the challenge of competing on the merits in our society. I argued strenuously against the inclination of blacks to see affirmative action as a totem—a policy assumed to lie beyond the bounds of legitimate criticism, symbolizing the nation's commitment to “do the right thing” for black people. However, in the wake of a successful ballot initiative banning affirmative action in California, I now find it necessary to reiterate the old, and in my view still valid, arguments on behalf of explicit public efforts to reduce racial inequality.

The current campaign against “preferences” goes too far by turning what before Proposition 209 had been a reform movement into an abolitionists' crusade. In my view, race-based allocations of public contracts, explicit double standards in the workplace, and large disparities in the test scores of blacks and whites admitted to elite universities are unwise practices, deservedly under attack. But the U.S. Army's programs to commission more black officers, the public funding of efforts to bring blacks into science and engineering, and the goal of public

universities to retain some racial diversity in their student bodies are all defensible practices that should be retained. The mere fact that these efforts take race into account should be not disqualifying.

Affirmative action, however prudently employed, can never be anything more than a marginal instrument for addressing the nation's unfinished racial business. But the proponents of colorblind policy who bill their crusade against “preferences” as the Second Coming of the civil rights movement display a ludicrous sense of misplaced priorities. They make a totem of ignoring race, even as the social isolation of the urban black poor reveals how important “color” continues to be in American society. Argument about the legality of the government's use of race only scratches the surface, because it fails to deal with the manifest significance of race in the private lives of Americans, black and white.

In the brave new dispensation, “color” is supposed to be irrelevant, yet everywhere we look in America, people are attending assiduously to race. The U.S. Census revealed that, among married people 25 to 34 years old in 1990, 70 percent of Asian women and 39 percent of Hispanic women, but only 2 percent of black women, had white husbands. Racially mixed church congregations are so rare that they make front-page news. So culturally isolated are black ghetto teens that linguists find their speech patterns to be converging across geographic distances, even as this emergent dialect grows increasingly dissimilar from the speech of poor whites living but a few miles away. Childless white couples travel to China in search of infants to adopt, while ghetto-born orphans go parentless. This is not to say that American society is irredeemably racist, but merely to illustrate how deeply imbedded in the social consciousness of our nation is the racial “otherness” of blacks. No accounts of contemporary race relations should minimize this fact. Yet that is precisely what the colorblind crusaders do.

Consider the commonsense observation that, in this country, an army where blacks are one-third of the enlisted personnel but only 3 percent of the officer corps is likely to function poorly. The U.S. army cares about the number of black captains because it needs to sustain effective cooperation among its personnel across racial lines. That the racial identities of captains and corporals sometimes matter to the smooth functioning of a military institution is a deep fact about our society that cannot be wished away.

But monitoring the number of blacks promoted to the rank of captain and formulating policies to increase that number are activities that inherently involve taking account of some individual's race. So radical critics of affirmative action must oppose this. Yet depending on how such activities are undertaken, they need not entail the promulgation of racial double standards, nor need they seem to declare, as a matter of official policy, that racial identity is a determinant of an individual's moral worth. As the military sociologist Charles Moskos is fond of pointing out, the Army is the only place in American society where large numbers of whites routinely take orders from blacks. So the irony is that the moral irrelevance of race, which the colorblind absolutists take as their highest principle, may be more evident to the members of the U.S. Army than elsewhere in our society precisely because the government has been allowed to use race in the conduct of its military personnel policies. ■



AMERICAN RACIAL AND ETHNIC POLITICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The course of American racial and ethnic politics over the next few decades will depend not only on dynamics within the African-American community, but also on relations between African Americans and other racial or ethnic groups. Both are hard to predict. The key question within the black community involves the unfolding relationship between material success and attachment to the American polity. The imponderable in ethnic relations is how the increasing complexity of ethnic and racial coalitions and of ethnicity-related policy issues will affect African-American political behavior. What makes prediction so difficult is not that there are no clear patterns in both areas. There are. But the current patterns are highly politically charged and therefore highly volatile and contingent on a lot of people's choices.

A CAUTIOUS LOOK AHEAD



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BY JENNIFER L. HOCHSCHILD

MATERIAL SUCCESS AND POLITICAL ATTACHMENT

Today the United States has a thriving, if somewhat tenuous, black middle class. By conventional measures of income, education, or occupation at least a third of African Americans can be described as middle class, as compared with about half of whites. That is an astonishing—probably historically unprecedented—change from the early 1960s, when blacks enjoyed the “perverse equality” of almost uniform poverty in which even the best-off blacks could seldom pass on their status to their children. Conversely, the depth of poverty among the poorest blacks is matched only by the length of its duration. Thus, today there is greater disparity between the top fifth and the bottom fifth of African Americans, with regard to income, education, victimization by violence, occupational status, and participation in electoral politics, than between the top and bottom fifths of white Americans.

An observer from Mars might suppose that the black middle class would be highly gratified by its recent and dramatic rise in status and that persistently poor blacks would be frustrated and embittered by their unchanging or even worsening fate. But today’s middle-class African Americans express a “rage,” to quote one popular writer, that has, paradoxically, grown along with their material holdings. In the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans who were well-off frequently saw *less* racial discrimination, both generally and in their own lives, than did those who were poor. Poor and poorly educated blacks were *more* likely than affluent or well-educated blacks to agree that “whites want to keep blacks down” rather than to help them or simply to leave them alone. But by the 1980s blacks with low status were perceiving *less* white hostility than were their higher-status counterparts.

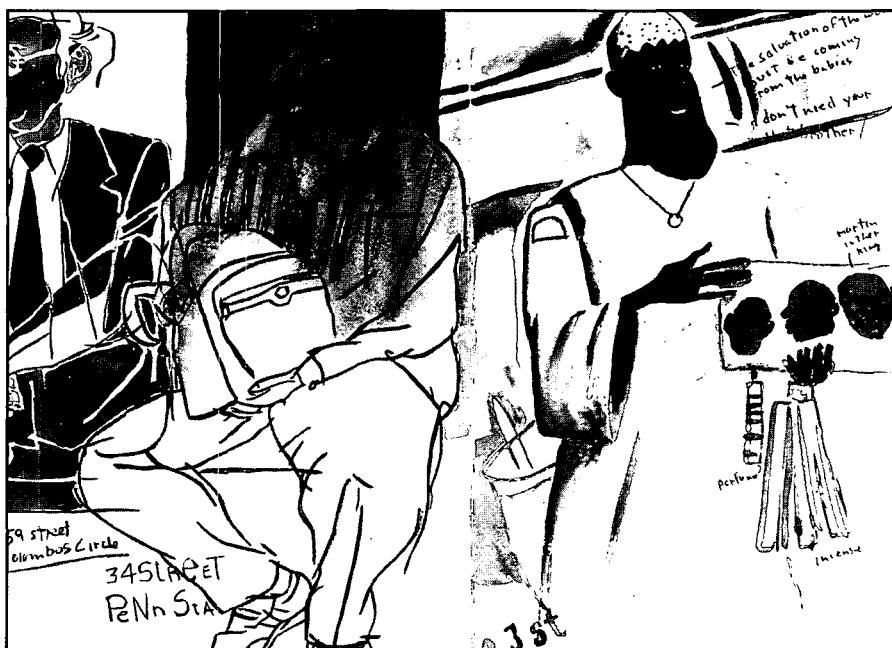
Recent evidence confirms affluent African Americans’ greater mistrust of white society. More college-educated blacks than black high school dropouts believe that it is true or might be true that “the government deliberately investigates black elected officials in order to discredit them,” that “the government deliberately makes sure that drugs are easily available in poor black neighborhoods in order to harm black people,” and that “the virus which causes AIDS was deliberately created in a laboratory in order to infect black people.” In a 1995 *Washington Post* survey, when asked whether “discrimination is the major reason for the economic and social ills blacks face,” 84 percent of middle-class blacks, as against 66 percent of working-class and poor blacks, agreed.

Ironically, today most poor and working-class African Americans remain committed to what Gunnar Myrdal called “the great national suggestion” of the American Creed. That is

a change; in the 1960s, more well-off than poor blacks agreed that “things are getting better...for Negroes in this country.” But, defying logic and history, since the 1980s poor African Americans have been much more optimistic about the eventual success of the next generation of their race than have wealthy African Americans. They are more likely to agree that motivation and hard work produce success, and they are often touchingly gratified by their own or their children’s progress.

Assume for the moment that these two patterns, of “succeeding more and enjoying it less” for affluent African Americans, and “remaining under the spell of the great national suggestion” for poor African Americans, persist and grow even stronger. That suggests several questions for political actors.

It is virtually unprecedented for a newly successful group of Americans to grow more and more alienated from the mainstream polity as it attains more and more material success. One exception, David Mayhew notes, is South Carolina’s plantation owners in the 1840s and 1850s. That frustrated group led a secessionist movement; what might embittered and



resource-rich African Americans do? At this point the analogy breaks down: the secessionists’ actions had no justification, whereas middle-class blacks have excellent reason to be intensely frustrated with the persistent, if subtle, racial barriers they constantly meet. If more and more successful African Americans become more and more convinced of what Orlando Patterson calls “the homeostatic...principle of the...system of racial domination”—racism is squelched in one place, only to arise with renewed force in another—racial interactions in the political arena will be fraught with tension and antagonism over the next few decades.

In that case, ironically, it may be working-class blacks’ continued faith in the great national suggestion that lends stability to Americans’ racial encounters. If most poor and working-class African Americans continue to care more about education, jobs, safe communities, and decent homes than about

racial discrimination and antagonism per se, they may provide a counterbalance in the social arena to the political and cultural rage of the black middle class.

But if these patterns should be reversed—thus returning us to the patterns of the 1960s—quite different political implications and questions would follow. For example, it is possible that the United States is approaching a benign “tipping point,” when enough blacks occupy prominent positions that whites no longer resist their success and blacks feel that American society sometimes accommodates them instead of always the reverse. That point is closer than it ever has been in our history, simply because never before have there been enough successful blacks for whites to *have* to accommodate them. In that case, the wealth disparities between the races will decline as black executives accumulate capital. The need for affirmative action will decline as black students’ SAT scores come to resemble those of whites with similar incomes. The need for majority-minority electoral districts will decline as whites discover that a black representative could represent *them*.



But what of the other half of a reversion to the pattern of 1960s beliefs, when poor blacks mistrusted whites and well-off blacks, and saw little reason to believe that conventional political institutions were on their side? If that view were to return in full force, among people now characterized by widespread ownership of firearms and isolation in communities with terrible schools and few job opportunities, there could indeed be a fire next time.

One can envision, of course, two other patterns—both wealthy and poor African Americans lose all faith, or both wealthy and poor African Americans regain their faith that the American creed can be put into practice. The corresponding political implications are not hard to discern. My point is that the current circumstances of African Americans are unusual and probably not stable. Political engagement and policy choices over the next few decades will determine whether affluent

African Americans come to feel that their nation will allow them to enjoy the full social and psychological benefits of their material success, as well as whether poor African Americans give up on a nation that has turned its back on them. Racial politics today are too complicated to allow any trend, whether toward or away from equality and comity, to predominate. Political leaders’ choices, and citizens’ responses, are up for grabs.

ETHNIC COALITIONS AND ANTAGONISMS

America is once again a nation of immigrants, as a long series of recent newspaper stories and policy analyses remind us. Since 1990 the Los Angeles metropolitan region has gained almost a million residents, the New York region almost 400,000, and the Chicago region 360,000—almost all from immigration or births to recent immigrants. Most of the nation’s fastest-growing cities are in the West and Southwest, and their growth is attributable to immigration. More than half of the residents of New York City are immigrants or children of immigrants. How will these demographic changes affect racial politics?

Projections show that the proportion of Americans who are neither white nor black will continue to increase, dramatically so in some regions. By 2030, whites will become a smaller proportion of the total population of the nation as a whole, and their absolute numbers will begin to decrease. The black population, now just over 13 percent, will grow, but slowly. The number of Latinos, however, will more than double, from 24 million in 1990 to almost 60 million in 2030 (absent a complete change in immigration laws). The proportion of Asians will also double.

A few states will be especially transformed. By 2030 Florida’s population is projected to double; by then its white population, now about seven times as large as either the black or Latino population, will be only three or four times as large. And today, of 30 million Californians, 56 percent are white, 26 percent Latino, 10 percent Asian, and 7 percent black. By 2020, when California’s population could grow by as much as 20 million (10 million of them new immigrants), only 35 percent of its residents are projected to be white; 40 percent will be Latino, 17 percent Asian, and 8 percent black.

These demographic changes may have less dramatic effects on U.S. racial politics than one might expect. For example, the proportion of *voters* who are white is much higher than the proportion of the *population* that is white in states such as California and Florida, and that disproportion

is likely to continue for some decades. Second, some cities, states, and even whole regions will remain largely unaffected by demographic change. Thus racial and ethnic politics below the national level will be quite variable, and even in the national government racial and ethnic politics will be diluted and constrained compared with the politics in states particularly affected by immigration. Third, most Latino and Asian immigrants are eager to learn English, to become Americans, and to be less insulated in ethnic communities, so their basic political framework may not differ much from that of native-born Americans.

Finally, there are no clear racial or ethnic differences on many political and policy issues; the fault lines lie elsewhere. For example, in the 1995 *Washington Post* survey mentioned earlier, whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians showed similar levels of support for congressional action to limit tax breaks for business (under 40 percent), balance the budget (over 75 percent), reform Medicare (about 55 percent), and cut personal income taxes (about 50 percent). Somewhat more variation existed in support for reforming the welfare system (around 75 percent support) and limiting affirmative action (around a third). The only issue that seriously divided survey participants was increased limits on abortion: 24 percent support among Asian Americans, 50 percent support among Latinos, and 35 percent and 32 percent support among whites and blacks respectively. Other surveys show similar levels of inter-ethnic support for proposals to reduce crime, balance the federal budget, or improve public schooling.

But when political disputes and policy choices are posed, as they frequently are, along lines that allow for competition among racial or ethnic groups, the picture looks quite different. African Americans are overwhelmingly likely (82 percent) to describe their own group as the one that “faces the most discrimination in America today.” Three in five Asian Americans agree that blacks face the most discrimination, as do half of whites. But Latinos split evenly (42 percent to 40 percent) over whether to award African Americans or themselves this dubious honor. The same pattern appears in more specific questions about discrimination. Blacks are consistently more likely to see bias against their own race than against others in treatment by police, portrayals in the media, the criminal justice system, promotion to management positions, and the ability to get mortgages and credit loans. Latinos are split between blacks and their own group on all these questions, whereas whites see roughly as much discrimination against all three of the non-white groups and Asians vary across the issues.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of the coming complexity in racial and ethnic politics is a 1994 National Conference survey asking representatives of the four major ethnic groups which other groups share the most and the least in common with their own group. According to the survey, whites feel most in common with blacks, who feel little in common with whites. Blacks feel most in common with Latinos, who feel least in common with them. Latinos feel most in common with whites, who feel little in com-

mon with them. Asian Americans feel most in common with whites, who feel least in common with them. Each group is running after another that is fleeing from it. If these results hold up in political activity, then American racial and ethnic politics in the 21st century are going to be interesting, to say the least.

Attitudes toward particular policy issues show even more clearly the instability of racial and ethnic coalitions. Latinos support strong forms of affirmative action more than do whites and Asians, but sometimes less than do blacks. In a 1995 survey, whites were much more likely to agree strongly than were blacks, Asians, and Latinos that Congress should “limit affirmative action.” But the converse belief—that Congress should *not* limit affirmative action—received considerable support only from African Americans. Across a variety of surveys, blacks are always the most likely to support affirmative action for blacks; blacks and Latinos concur frequently on weaker though still majority support for affirmative action for Latinos, and all groups concur in lack of strong support for affirmative action for Asians. Exit polls on California’s Proposition 209 banning affirmative action found that 60 percent of white voters, 43 percent of Asian voters, and just over one-quarter of black and Latino voters supported the ban.

What might seem a potential coalition between blacks and Latinos is likely to break down, however—as might the antagonism between blacks and whites—if the issue shifts from affirmative action to immigration policy. The data are too sparse to be certain of any conclusion, especially for Asian Americans, but Latinos and probably Asians are more supportive of policies to encourage immigration and offer aid to immigrants than are African Americans and whites. A recent national poll by the Princeton Survey Research Associates suggests why African Americans and whites resemble each other and differ from Latinos in their preferences for immigration policy: without exception they perceive the effects of immigration—on such things as crime, employment, culture, politics, and the quality of schools—to be less favorable than do Latinos.

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE POSSIBILITIES

We can only guess at this point about how the complicated politics of racial and ethnic competition and coalition-building will connect with the equally complicated politics of middle-class black alienation and poor black marginality. These are quintessentially political questions; the economic and demographic trajectories merely set the conditions for an array of political possibilities ranging from assimilation to a racial and ethnic cold war. I conclude only with the proposal that there is more room for racial and ethnic comity than we sometimes realize because most political issues cut across group lines—but achieving that comity will require the highly unlikely combination of strong leadership and sensitive negotiation. ■

The Way We Were

Beware the Tricks that Social Security Memories Play

BY PAUL C. LIGHT

THE EMERGING DEBATE about how to repair Social Security in time for the baby boom's retirement has rekindled memories of the ways things were when Congress and the president found the political will to overhaul the New Deal flagship in 1983. President Clinton has called for another national dialogue, followed by a White House conference next December and a congressional summit in January, while Speaker Gingrich has endorsed a Social Security commission modeled on the one that pulled off the 1983 rescue.

Paul C. Light is the author of *Still Artful Work: The Continuing Politics of Social Security Reform* (McGraw Hill, 1995), which chronicles and updates the history of the 1983 rescue. He wrote the first edition of the book while a senior scholar at the Brookings Institution.

Ironically, these musings come on the 15th anniversary of the near-collapse of the commission. The National Commission on Social Security Reform had all the right players: Bill Armstrong, Bob Dole, and Patrick Moynihan from the Senate; Bill Archer, Barber Conable, and Claude Pepper from the House; former SSA Commissioner Bob Ball representing Speaker Tip O'Neill; and an honest-broker chairman named Alan Greenspan. It also had all the right options, courtesy of its executive director and former Social Security Chief Actuary Bob Myers. And it even had an extraordinary deadline. Absent action by June 1983, Social Security would exhaust its available reserves, which included a short-term loan from what was then a much healthier Medicare fund and would have to start delaying benefit checks until the needed revenues came in.

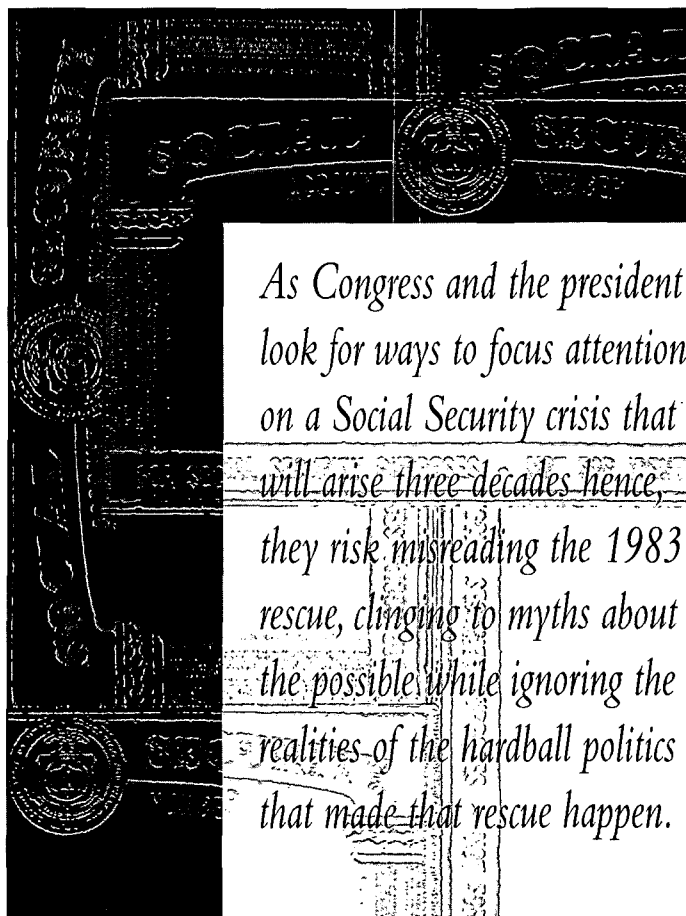
Nevertheless, the closer the commission moved toward the deadline, the further it divided over the options. Congress and presidents have always enjoyed the act of giving, as the gleeful bidding over the new-found federal budget surplus confirms. It is the taking away that causes trouble. The commission simply could not agree on how to allocate the pain.

It was also just about 15 years ago that Moynihan approached Dole on the Senate floor and asked whether they couldn't do something to rescue the effort. Two days later, the secret Gang of Nine, as Conable called it, started negotiating. Three weeks later, the commission had its \$168 billion rescue package. Eight weeks later, Congress and the president had a signing ceremony. By snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, the commission assured itself a place as one of the misty watercolor memories of the way we were.

Social Security Myths

Can it be that it was all so simple then? Not hardly. Time has, in fact, rewritten many of the lines. Thus, as Congress and the president look for ways to focus attention on a Social Security crisis that will arise three decades hence, they risk misreading the 1983 rescue, clinging to myths about the possible while ignoring the realities of the hardball politics that made that rescue happen.

Indeed, the first myth that has grown up around the 1983



rescue is that it was the product of rational science, not raw politics. Although rational analysis certainly framed the conversation about the size of the problem and range of options, the final compromise was the product of politics. Business opposed any acceleration of already scheduled payroll tax increases, the elderly lobby opposed any benefit cuts, and labor opposed any retirement age increase.

Luckily perhaps, none of the solutions by itself produced enough savings or revenues to plug the \$168 billion problem. Tax increases couldn't do it all, nor could benefit cuts or retirement age increases. Therein were the beginnings of a compromise. Congress and the president would have to hurt all sides roughly equally. In the end, it was taxation of Social Security benefits for higher-income groups that

anchored the compromise. By creating a solution that could be a tax increase to labor and a benefit cut to business, the plan allowed both sides to claim that the other had given in.

Fifteen years later, the opposing camps are still mostly the same and still mostly where we would expect them to be. The only difference is that privatization has become a legitimate option for long-term reform. In 1983, the privatizers were easily dismissed as crackpots. Today, they have stronger economic models, a slightly more sympathetic public (though there is substantial resistance to the idea across all generations), and influential allies, not least being the investment firms that might get a piece of the action. Privatization will have to be part of any public conversation about reform.

The second myth is that the American public was somehow prepared to accept a package of pain. Much as President Clinton is right to imagine an informed public as an asset in reforming Social Security, the state of public opinion in 1983 is best characterized as a mix of fear and loathing. Young Americans were (and mostly still are) convinced that they would never see a penny of their Social Security taxes, while older Americans were simultaneously terrified by the rhetoric of impending doom and angered by the specter of benefit cuts. Given a choice of solutions to the crisis, most Americans picked "none of the above."

Fifteen years later, Americans are a bit wiser perhaps, but hardly more enthusiastic about the kinds of benefit cuts and tax increases needed to solve next century's crisis. Nor are they much more confident about ever seeing any Social Security

benefits themselves. If there is any glimmer of hope, according to a new survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, it is that baby boomers and their younger siblings seem to have lowered their expectations about what the program will provide when they retire. This declining self-interest could create a bit of flexibility as Congress and the president look for long-term savings, particularly in the form of benefit cuts.

The third and most important myth is that the commission was an unqualified success. Its final recommendations came close, no doubt, closing the short-term gap with what turned out to be dollars to spare. But with time running out, the commission punted the remainder of the long-term problem to Congress. Congress didn't act, of course, leaving the long-term problem to rear its head again today.

That Congress did anything about the long term at all is actually something of a miracle. After all, it could easily have postponed the whole thing. Instead, it used the 1983 panic to hammer through a two-year increase in the retirement age that was solely justified by the long-term problem, and exploited the lack of indexing in the taxation of benefits provision to get an even bigger hunk. Alas, President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich have no such hammer today. They have the long-term problem, and the long-term problem alone, to address.

Social Security Realities

The fact that the 1983 rescue took place in the midst of an action-forcing crisis is only one of the realities that are sometimes forgotten as we look back. Congress and the president came to agreement only after a two-year firefight that began with Budget Director David Stockman's 1981 proposal to slash early retirement benefits. Reluctant as we are to remember, the National Commission on Social Security Reform was created not so much to repair the program as to get the issue off the front pages so the Reagan Revolution could continue. Consider three other realities.

The first reality is that the action-forcing crisis that produced the final agreements in March 1983 was mostly manufactured. It was set in motion by Conable, who refused to support the Medicare loan in 1982 until Congress agreed to a time-certain end to the borrowing. He had just enough

votes to make the quid pro quo stick. By picking the summer of 1983 for the crisis, he did his best to give Congress a chance to inflict the needed pain well ahead of the next elections.

It is impossible to overestimate the impact of that crisis on the eventual rescue. It created an excuse for doing the unthinkable, a way for Congress and the president to claim victory even as they inflicted tax increases and benefit cuts on the American public. It also created locomotive velocity once an agreement was in place. Which member wanted to be the one to derail the compromise? Who wanted to be the one to bankrupt the program?

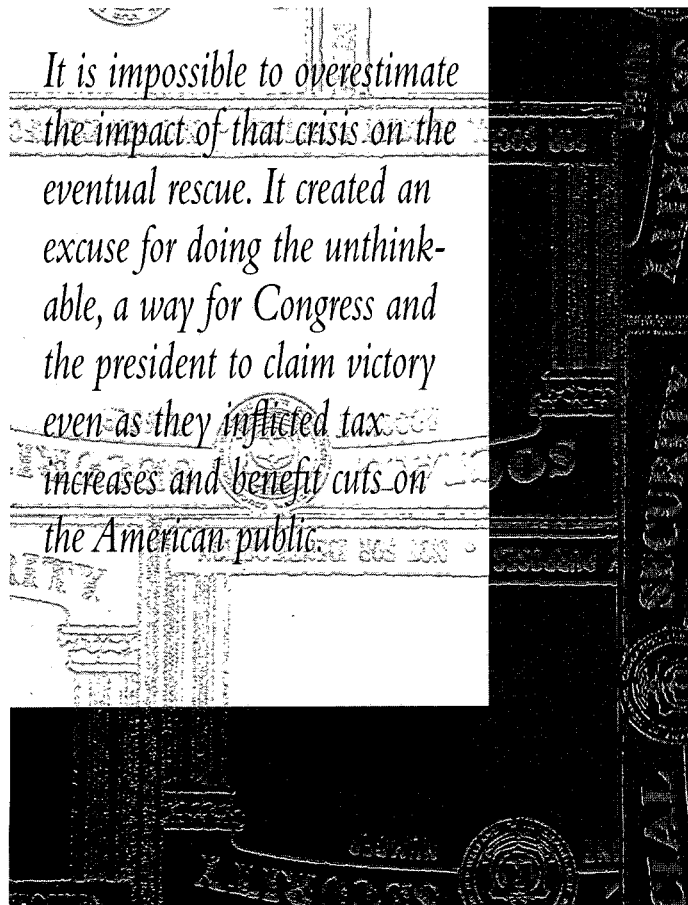
Washington is a bit short of catastrophe today. And unless it is ready to admit that the new-found budget surplus is due in part to the masking effects of a still growing Social Security reserve fund—effects that will evaporate when today's baby boom taxpayers become Social Security beneficiaries in the next century—Washington is without an action-forcing crisis too. Absent action, checks will not be delayed until, oh, about 2029.

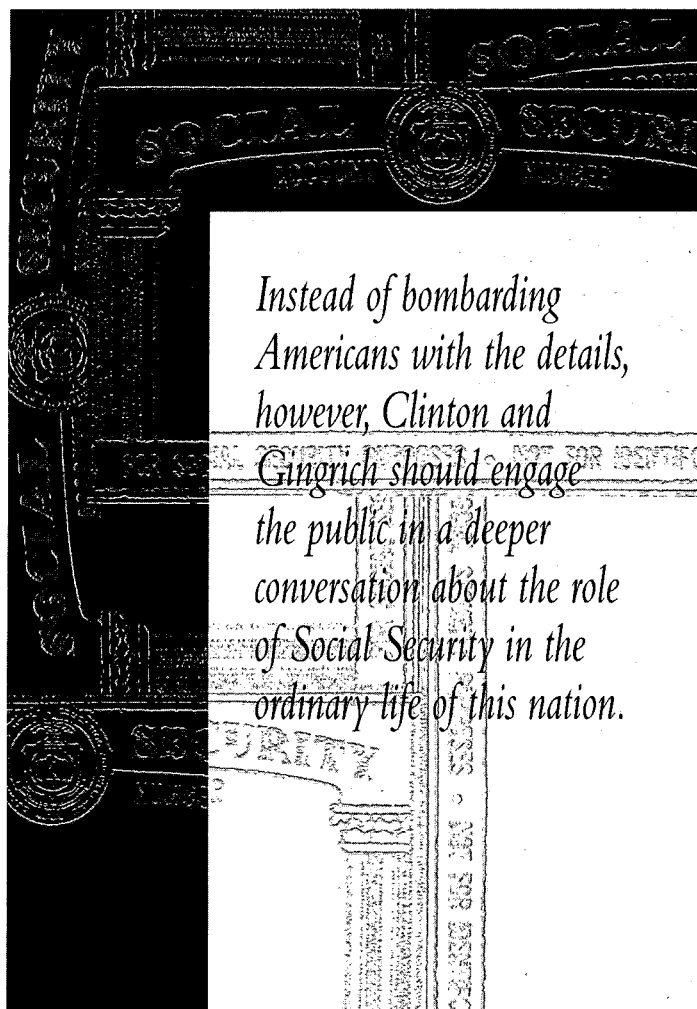
The second reality is that the commission's greatest contribution was not in producing the final rescue package, but in defining the size of the problem. Initially, Democrats had felt that the payroll tax increases enacted in the 1977 Social Security rescue would be enough to stave off the short-term crisis.

But as the economy began to falter in 1981, even the most optimistic Democrats began to acknowledge a problem. The question was not whether Social Security was in trouble, but

by how much. A small problem might require small solutions, perhaps just acceleration of one of the already scheduled tax increases. A much bigger problem might require more dramatic action, including benefit cuts and cost-of-living freezes. By winning agreement on a \$150–200 billion short-term target, the commission created the essential benchmark against which to measure any package. Ever the teacher, Moynihan was essential to the agreement. "We can have our own opinions," he said at the key moment, "but not our own facts."

There are no such benchmarks today. Most, but not all, experts agree that the program will falter sometime in the 2020s when its savings run dry.





Most also seem to believe that fixing the program would be easier now than later. But there is no fixed figure against which to measure a package. Nor has there ever been. Long-term Social Security problems are traditionally measured in the percentage of taxable payroll needed to close a shortfall, not in the total dollars at stake over a 75-year time frame. Such figures are hardly the stuff of ordinary kitchen-table conversation. A 1 percent long-term funding gap may ultimately equal hundreds of billions of current-year dollars, but it still sounds like a relatively small problem to most Americans.

The third reality is that the 1983 rescue was the product of secret negotiations that took place completely out of public view. The final agreement involved Kissinger-esque shuttle diplomacy between the White House and Congress that began just days before Christmas when Stockman engaged Moynihan, his former Harvard mentor, in the first of several conversations about the future of Social Security. At just about the same time, White House Deputy Chief of Staff Richard Darman called on Bob Ball for a similar talk. Before long, members of the Gang of Nine were being whisked to secret meetings at Blair House. So much for open national dialogue as prelude to action.

In lending its imprimatur to the negotiations, the commission provided something in remarkably short supply these

days: political cover. Congress could point to the commission as the cause of any pain, shifting the focus to an entity that had no forwarding address. By wrapping their package in the red-white-and-bipartisan-blue of the commission, rescuers improved the odds of success. It is always easier to defend a bipartisan compromise than a secret deal.

If We Had the Chance to Do It All Again

It is hardly surprising that presidents and speakers would look back dreamingly at the 1983 rescue. It marks a high point in making tough choices and still stands as one of those rare moments when Congress and the president, not some appointed commission, actually decided to decide. As Conable described it on the floor of the House, the final package was not a work of art, but it was undeniably artful work.

The question is whether it can be done again—and this time so far ahead of the predicted doom. Although action of any kind is a very long shot, Congress and the president might consider two rather different paths to reform. The first is to find a new way of talking about the long-term problem. The current conversation is simply too technical for ordinary people. Few Americans think they have a good understanding of what the Social Security program is or does, let alone of the long-term consequences of a steadily aging America. Although Americans are smarter about Social Security today than they were in 1983—few still believe that we all have our own passbooks at Social Security headquarters in Baltimore, for example—they are quite confused about the options for reform.

Instead of bombarding Americans with the details, however, Clinton and Gingrich should engage the public in a deeper conversation about the role of Social Security in the ordinary life of this nation. (Such, indeed is the hope of the Pew-funded Americans Discuss Social Security project.) Fixing Social Security is more than just a technical issue. It is also one of those rare issues that taps into deeply held beliefs about how Americans intend to live out their lives. Absent that conversation, Clinton's proposed Christmas summit will likely fail. With it, the summit just might produce a very special package.

A second, more immediate option is to tinker with Social Security if and when Congress and the president finally act on Medicare. It seems only fair to let Medicare do the blocking this time. After all, Congress attached the Medicare prospective payment system to the 1983 Social Security bill. Given its current condition, Medicare has both the more easily understandable problem and the greater potential for the kind of action-forcing crisis that might lead to a possible rescue. Depending on the depth of the crisis, which is still a decade or so hence, Congress and the president just might be able to attach a modest Social Security package to a Medicare rescue. Doing so would mean hard bargaining, likely under the cover of crisis. It might also mean another secret gang, perhaps even a trip or two to Blair House. But those are just the kind of events that helped secure the 1983 rescue. All we have to do is remember. ■

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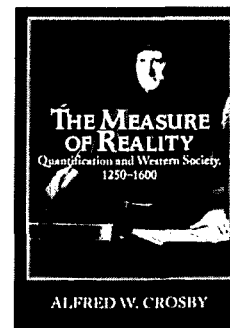
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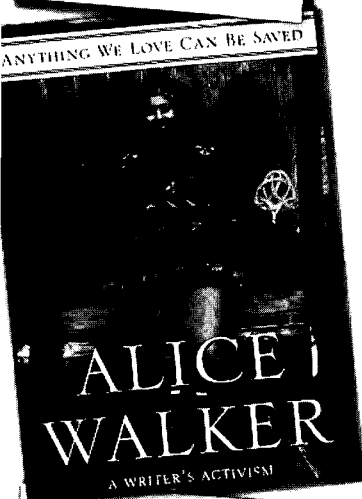
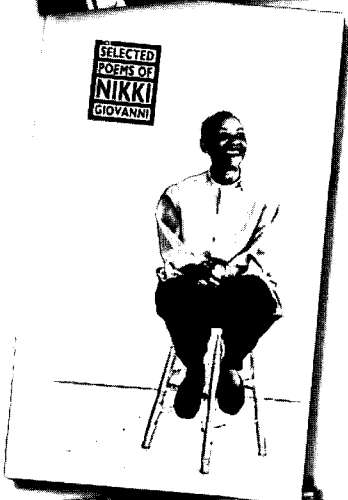
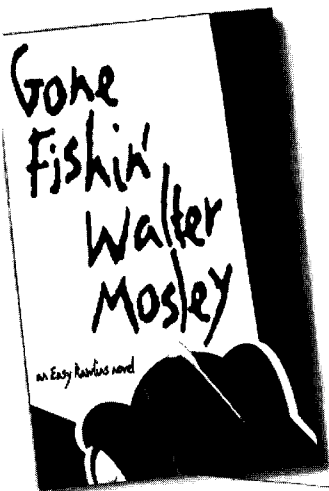


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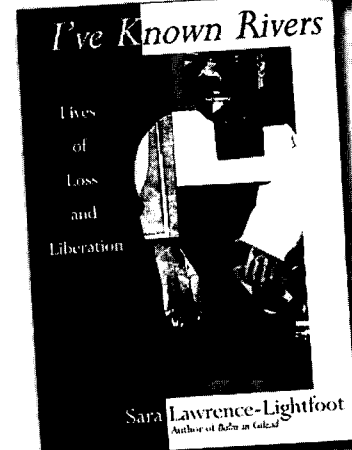
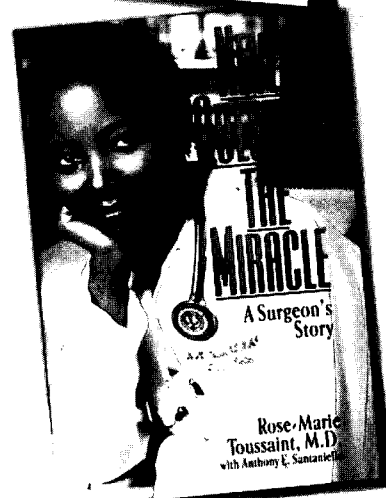
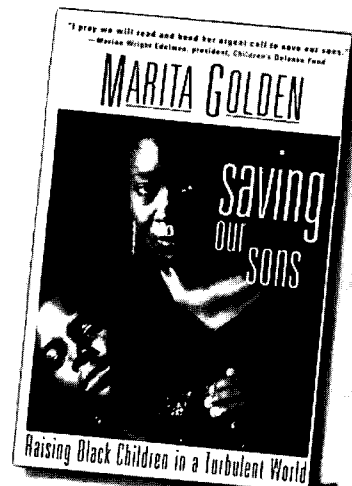
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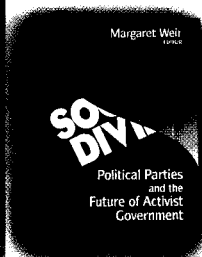
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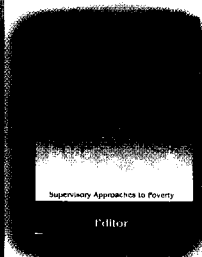
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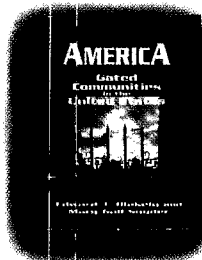


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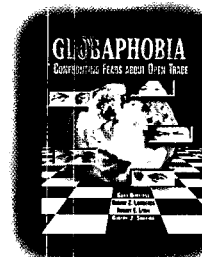


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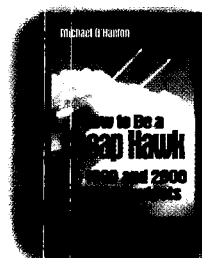


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